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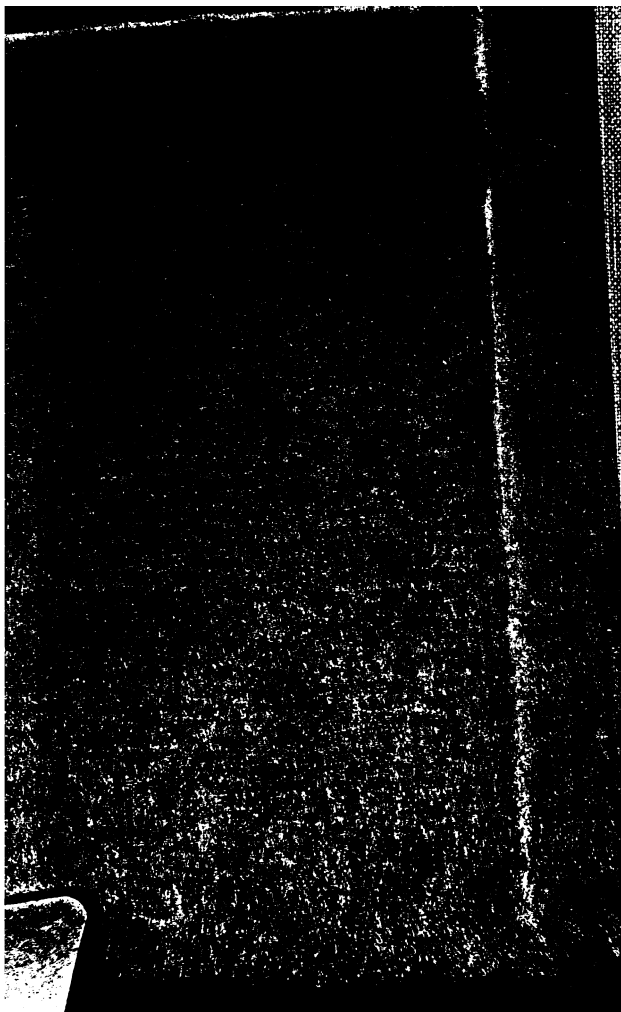
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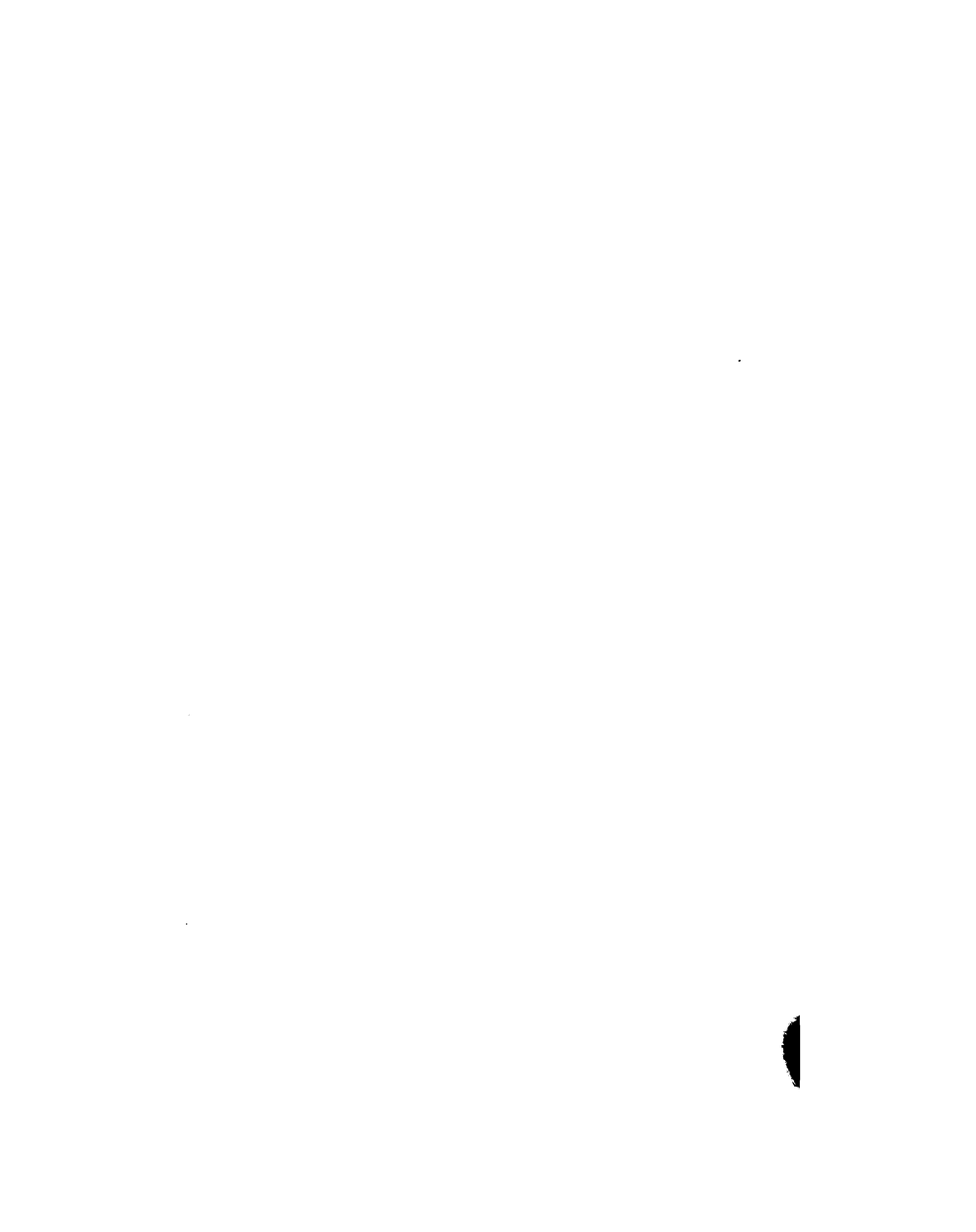


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**COLLECTION**  
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**CASTLE AVON.**  
**IN TWO VOLUMES.**  
**VOL. I.**





# CASTLE AVON.

BY THE AUTHOR  
OF "EMILIA WYNDHAM," "RAVENSCLIFFE,"  
&c., &c.

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IN TWO VOLUMES.

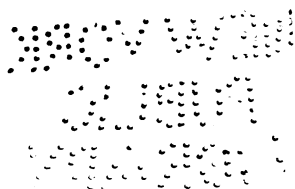
VOL. I.



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BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

1852



# CASTLE AVON.

VOL. I.

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## CHAPTER I.

"A voice was heard in Ramah, Rachel mourning for her children, and would not be comforted because they were not."

Oh, what a fearful night it is! How the wind roars and howls round the house, and what torrents of rain pour down between the blasts! Surely a water-spout must have burst among the hills. The rain falls in flakes, in flashes, in streams of water, rather than descends in drops.

Sometimes she leaves that bedside by which she is sitting, her hand clasped in his, and hastens to a room of which the window overlooks the front door. She opens the casement, and thrusts her head out, regardless of the driving storm, and vainly striving to pierce the thick darkness of that pitiless night. Vainly, indeed! — a pitchy darkness is round her; she cannot even trace the faintest image of the neighbouring woods; she cannot see the trees close to the house; she cannot even see her hand.

The tempest howls furiously; the casement shakes in her fingers, she with difficulty draws it in. She *fastens it, turns yet one glance upon the impenetrable*  
*Castle Avon. I.*

darkness without — one straining, anxious, almost despairing glance, and then returns to watch by the bedside.

The sufferer raises his heavy eyelids as she enters, and one fitful gleam of intelligence is cast upon her from eyes which never met hers but in love; then he murmurs a few words, which she bends her head down with anxious, hungry impatience to understand.

"Is he come?" the sufferer faintly articulates.

"Not yet, not yet; but I expect him every moment."

"A long, weary night. Oh, when will it be morning?"

And the heavy eye-lids closed again. And then another blast rushed by, wilder and louder than ever, and the rain poured against the windows.

And it seemed as if a shrieking might be heard, as of spirits passing over the roof of the many-gabled wilderness of a house, and the wind roared among the old chimneys, and shook at the casements, as if clamouring to come in. The sinking spirits of the dying man, though he was too far gone to listen to the tempest, were evidently shaken and exhausted by this tumult of external nature, and the flame of life just flashing, as in a sinking candle, wasted all the faster because of this.

And the breath came with more difficulty, and the dark shadows began to deepen over his face, and he seemed to sink into a state half slumber, half death, and still she sat by his side.

*Sometimes she cast those eyes, so full of passionate love, upwards, imploring the mercy from above*

to abate this pitiless storm without, to assuage the cruel anguish within. But she prayed without hope, for he she loved was rapidly departing; and still the storm without raged on, and her other treasure — the treasure also so passionately, so desperately loved — where was he?

In that storm? Among those wild woods, or traversing those desolate moors? And in such a night as this?

Then she stole out of the chamber of death again, and went and stood at the top of the stairs, and looked down into the hall, now dimly lighted by a half-extinguished lamp.

There was a dark figure standing by one of the pillars below. She spoke in a low, trembling voice, and asked:

"Who is that?"

"Only me, Madam."

"What are you doing there?"

"Only listening and watching."

She came half-way down the stairs to speak to him over the banisters.

"Willmore," in a low, trembling whisper.

"Yes, Madam."

"You are sure Mr. Yates is not come back? He might have come in the stable-way."

"Oh no, Madam, he is not come back."

"How did he go? On horseback?"

"Yes, Madam. The roads are so bad, he said he could bring the child more safely upon a cushion before him than in any other way."

"What horse did he take?"

"*Old Black Bess.*"

"She is very quiet?"

"As a lamb, Madam."

"But in such a night as this! Surely he would take a chaise."

"No doubt he would do so, Madam; but the road for carriages is a very long way round, and even that, at best, but a narrow lane, full of ruts."

"A chaise would, of necessity, be a long time coming?"

"At any time; and on a night like —"

And as he spoke such a hurricane beat against the great heavy hall door, that it seemed as if it would burst it open. Every window rattled violently, the house itself seemed to rock to its foundation, and rain in deluges poured down upon the skylight.

"I almost think," said Willmore, "Mr. Yates would hardly venture out at all with the child in such weather as this. He must have determined to stay till morning."

"God grant it may be as you say."

And swiftly she re-ascended the stairs and stole into her husband's room, and sat down by his bedside and slid her hand into his. He still slumbered.

And so she sat, and hour and hour rolled by, to and fro by the sullen clang of the large stable clock. Gradually, however, the violence of the storm seemed to abate, and as the chill hours before dawn drew onwards, the deluge of rain was assuaged and the windows of heaven appeared to be closing again, as the water-drops fell in a sort of measured cadence and the wind mourned rather than raged. Still the sufferer slumbered, and she, as she held his hand, sank insensibly into a doze and slumbered too; &

the lamp threw a flickering ray upon the chamber, its wide extent and gloomy magnificence in part dimly seen through that gray twilight, in part lost in impenetrable shadow. But the light fell full upon the bed with its heavy dark green velvet curtains and its covering of quilted satin, in which lay one whom not all his wealth and splendour, not all his goodness and usefulness, not all the passionate devotion of a young and yearning heart, could redeem from an early grave. For He had summoned him, whose sentence is without appeal. The span of life was at an end, the thread of life was spun out, and he must go.

In the sure and certain hope of a blessed future?

Yes. Through God's infinite mercies in the sure and certain hope.

And though she, that young and fair, and idolizing and idolized one, on whom his heart doated, must be left behind. Yet in that sure and certain hope they both prepared to part, and bowed the head and accepted the cross in patience, and in faith in the restitution of all things.

They should meet again! Yes, they should meet again!

The flame of the lamp casts its long dim ray upon that angel face and figure, covered with her white dressing-gown, and her beautiful golden hair gathered up under her close nursing-cap, her long throat, bending like a lily, bowed down, for her head has sunk and rests against a pillow lying on one side of the bed, where she still holds his hand.

He had prepared himself to go, so soon as his doom had been pronounced by the medical attendant,



and he had only requested that the few hours which remained to him in this world might be passed with his wife in quiet and peace, without the hurry of attendance or the bustle of now useless endeavour.

They had taken leave of each other, as hearts that truly love do. For the infinite of love is a revelation in itself. Those who love most, believe most. Such feelings as theirs are made for eternity, and reveal eternity. But one fond feeling still remained unsatisfied, one tender tie still drew him back to earth.

His little child. He must see his little child again before he died. The boy was at his grandmother's, some twenty miles distance, and a track of desolate mountain, moor and woodland lay between the two houses. Twenty miles it was, right across the country; but by the carriage road, or rather through the deep lanes by which carriages might possibly make their way, nearly twenty miles more.

During the agonizing paroxysms of extreme suffering on the one side and the almost equally agonizing alternations of hope and fear upon the other, neither parent had seemed to miss or to wish for the child; but when the fatal sentence was pronounced, and the calm of a terrible certainty succeeded to the agitations of suspense, the father asked to embrace his baby-boy before he died; and the poor mother's heart yearned with an intensity indescribable to see her infant once more, though for the last time, in his father's arms, and to hear him bless him before he died.

All — all he could do for this son of his love now. *But oh, that blessing! Let him but have his father's dying blessing! was her heart's prayer.*

Immediately upon this Mr. Yates had started, and owing to the state of the roads and the circumstances above mentioned, had decided upon crossing the country, mounted on a large powerful black horse, whose gentleness and steadiness were only equalled by his mighty strength, and upon bringing home the little boy placed upon a cushion before him — a manner of carrying young children at that time not uncommon, when the state of the cross-roads was often such, as to make travelling in carriages very slow and inconvenient, not to say dangerous work.

The steward — for Mr. Yates was the steward, head and confidential man in this large establishment — had set forwards about twelve o'clock that morning; he calculated upon arriving at the Grange in about two hours and a half, resting there a couple of hours, and being back at Glistonbury between seven and eight o'clock in the evening.

The equinox was already past; yet still between seven and eight, though that night there happened to be no moon, sufficient light, he hoped, would remain to enable him to find his way easily through the moors home, to say nothing of the instincts of Black Bess, who was well acquainted with every foot of the way.

But seven and eight, and nine and ten, and midnight had passed, and no Mr. Yates had appeared; until at last the wearied household, concluding that the desperate state of the weather had prevented him setting out, or that he had taken a chaise, stole one after another to bed, leaving nobody up in that large household but Mr. Willmore and the housekeeper, *and one or two of the older women-servants, whose*

sorrow and anxiety for their master and mistress made it impossible for them to rest. The old coachman and two or three of the grooms also sat dozing in the servants' hall, whose windows looked towards the stable-yard, imagining that at any hour Mr. Yates might arrive.

So all was very still in that mansion of death, over which a feeling of solemn awfulness hung, and a heaviness crept over one and over another as it had done over the gentle and loving wife and mother herself.

It was so quiet, you might distinctly hear the death-watch ticking behind the case of the great kitchen clock, which was now down, lest its striking should disturb the master; and the snoring of the old bloodhound, which had been the old Lord's, and now lay stretched upon the kitchen hearth. For the raging tempest had begun to subside, and the winds to sing a mournful lullaby and requiem over the good man who was about to depart — the man whom all loved and honoured much, and deeply. Nature, at last, seemed to yield to the all-pervading melancholy, and to mourn,

“As things inanimate will mourn,”

over the unreturning grave, alas!

And so he slumbers: and she, her hand in his, dozes; and now opens her eyes, and gazes at him; and now the heavy lids close again — for her heart is overladen with grief, and her eyes with watching, *and the profound quiet sheds its influence upon her.*

*And in her doze, she sees that lovely, loving child, with his golden curling locks, and his large eyes*

of blue — so full of the mysterious depths of infant love and passion, and his cherub arms are round his father's neck; and that extenuated, but still most beautiful hand, is upon the child's head, and those eyes — those eyes into which she was wont to look, with something of the adoration of a poor Pagan when looking at his god — those eyes are raised up in prayer, and he is blessing his boy — their boy — the bond which bound them, if possible, still closer and closer together.

Oh! sweet dream!

She awakes suddenly from it. She springs up and listens. A cry! — yes! she heard a cry, surely. Again — again! What is it? — what is it?

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## CHAPTER II.

THE cry sounded as if it made a part of the dreams of an uneasy slumber, yet it started her awake; and as she still listened, confused and scarcely herself, it was repeated. Then there was a sort of subdued noise and hurry to be heard, upon that side of the house which was occupied by the servants, and with which the passage, into which her bed-room opened, communicated by a back staircase. There was, also, a large window at the end of this passage, which looked into the stable-yard.

As she listened, her ear rendered preternaturally acute by her state of nervous agitation, she thought she caught the sound of horses' hoofs in the yard.

A moment she stood still, with lifted ear, listening breathless, as if life depended on the sound; then she cast one fond look upon the bed where the dying man lay, and quick as lightning darted from his side, and flew down the staircase, and along the passage which led to the stable-yard door.

It was open, and the servants were gathered outside it; and strange noises, as of men in distress and perplexity, proceeded from without. Such were not the delighted greetings that ought to have welcomed her boy! Her heart began to quiver and tremble, to *fail and sink* again; but she was rushing forward, *when, just before she reached the open door, she was met and her dress caught by Willmore.*

"Come! come! He is come! — I heard the horse's feet. Where is he? — where is he? My child — my treasure!"

No answer; but an endeavour upon the part of the faithful old servant, gently to push her back.

"What — why — what is the matter, Willmore?"

The old man's face was pale as ashes.

"My boy! — my boy!"

She looked in his face, then desperately tore away from him, dashed forward, and wildly rushed into the stable-yard.

There it stood; yes, there stood the horse — the good black steed; but covered with mire, bathed in moisture, scared, panting and alone! A groom held his head. But Mr. Yates and the child, where were they?

"What — what! what is this? My boy! Mr. Yates! What is this? The horse! — What is this?"

"The horse came home alone; he rushed into the stable-yard full gallop, as if he was mad; all drowned over, as one may say, with water and mud; his eye wild, and his nostril distended, as if he had been scared out of his wits. And, oh! the ford — the ford!" cried the groom, as he finished his relation.

"The ford! — the ford!" was taken up by the voices around; "swelled by the rains — swelled by the rains!"

"Do you mean to say the horse has come home alone, and that the steward and the boy are drowned!" she screamed, rather than cried. "Oh! my God! — my God! the ford — the ford!" and she darted forwards, as if she would rush out of the stable-yard, and seek the lost herself.

Oh! how the wind came howling from that wilderness, and as if the cries of drowning wretches were mingling in the blast! But old Willmore hurried after his lady, and once more caught her by the gown.

"Madam — my lady — mistress! my master — my dying master!"

"Oh, yes! he is dying! — I know he is dying! But what will he do for his boy? Let me go! — let me go!" she cried, passionately, again endeavouring to rend her garments from his hands; "they are struggling in the waters! Run! run all of us — all of you! We may yet save them!"

"Alas! my lady — mistress, dear mistress! be patient. Think of God, dear mistress, and be patient. Oh dear — oh dear! The ford is six miles off!" cried the old man, bursting into tears.

"Six miles off! Do you say six miles off? Well, well, let us run right across the moor: what is six miles? My God! will you none of you move an inch to save them!"

"They are gone already, mistress — Madam. John Gardner, and the coachman, and Will, started off as soon as Black Bess drove like a mad thing into the yard. They thought there must be a mischief: they are gone to see. Dear, dear mistress, what could you do? And my poor master dying all alone!" said the old man, sobbing aloud.

"Ah well — ah well!" she answered, looking round composedly, and as if her wits were beginning to leave her. "One dying, and the other drowned! *You told me to call upon God, didn't you, old man? — 'Out of the depths' — ay, that is it. Take me back to my husband's death-bed, Willmore! for my*

knees are knocking together, and I think I can't stand. Take me back to my husband, my lover, my only — only friend, to his death-bed. He'll soon be lost and gone, too! Take me back, Willmore!"

The old man obeyed, assisted by the housekeeper. They lifted, rather than led her back to her husband's bedside. She sank down again into the chair she had quitted. She neither sighed, nor shed a tear; her heart felt as a stone within her; her glazed eyes turned wistfully to her husband. He lay there, still in a sort of quiet, unbroken doze; his breathings low and regular, except for a few pauses; one fair hand stretched out upon the bed. Gradually she slipped down upon her knees, took it in both hers, and laid her cheek against it.

It was very cold: no pressure answered to hers. The soul had already retreated to its last citadel, before taking its last flight!

Suddenly, as the flame of a candle before it expires leaps up in the socket, a glow seemed to revisit the frame. The eyes of the expiring man suddenly opened:

"The child," he uttered distinctly; "the child, love! — love, the child!" and he expired.

---

She could not and would not believe for some time that he was really gone; that the dark, mysterious curtain which severs the living and the dead had fallen; and that the one so loved, so clung to, the great reality of her existence, was dissolved. That, *become an object of faith, an existence to her spirit*



alone, which had been the most beloved of all actual existences.

She was stunned, confused as a stone; the idea was too overwhelming, too stupendous, too unintelligible for conception. She stood and gazed — and gazed — and gazed. She did not know where she was: all material things seemed reeling round her. It was no longer a substantial world in which she stood; everything was a dream now, for he was become a dream.

The poor servants, who had now crowded into the room — for all ceremony and distinction of rank had vanished before the awful realities of that night — her poor servants knew not what to do for her. Poor things, they were bewildered themselves, with grief and horror, and this dumb, tearless sorrow, terrified and perplexed them. They expected wailings and tears, and hysterical cries; but this terrible silence was the more terrible, because they could not understand it. They looked one at another, uncertain what to do.

Willmore was quite at a stand. The housekeeper, good woman, who had known the loss of child and husband herself, comprehended a trifle better. She felt that out of this stupor the poor young creature must be roused, or that she would lose her senses. To do this she could imagine nothing better, than gently to lay her hand upon the lifeless body, as if with intent to move it. The poor young thing started at this, and stretched hastily forward, as if to prevent an *impious* hand from touching a sacred relic.

*"How dare you?"* she cried.

*The spell was dissolved — she had spoken.*

Willmore now ventured to come up to her, and with his kind, respectful, old servant's voice and manner, say: "Dear missis, you must come out of this; you must indeed."

"Must I?—must I? Yes, yes: it is all over now," and bursting into a flood of tears, she wailed, and cried aloud, as the old man gently led her away.

This kindly relief of nature lasted but till she entered the passage, and cast her eyes upon the window which looked towards the stables; then she suddenly began shuddering and shaking. Then as suddenly she cried out: "I remember, I remember; there is nothing to keep me here now. Get out the cart as fast as you can, *that* can go over the moors any way, and let me be off to the ford; let us follow the track—track the horse's feet, Willmore, as the wild Indians do; follow the trail—follow the trail; we shall find them yet—we shall find them yet."

Her speech was hurried and incoherent, but the old man was glad to find that the matter of it was sound.

"Yes, Madam," he said, "I will have the cart out instantly, and drive you myself the way to the ford. The track is easy enough to find; it lies right across the hills. Black Bess would be sure to take that one, as, poor beast, she could not have found a nigher. There, Mrs. Fulmer, get your mistress's cloak and bonnet, and fetch her a cup of warm milk and water too," he whispered; "she'll drink that. Don't try for anything more yet awhile."

He was glad to get his poor lady out upon the moors; though the wind whistled mournfully, and it *was* *dismally* cold; and the rain, though it had abated

still from time to time came gushing down in sudden showers.

So she suffered them to put on her cloak and bonnet, and placed herself hastily in the spring cart; for, as her recollection gradually returned, her whole soul was agonizing to be at the ford, with that natural impatience to see and act herself, which possesses every one upon such occasions.

And so they set out for the moors. And now, the dawn began to break, and a silver line of light to show itself behind the desolate hills, from beneath a heavy, lifted cloud.

They followed a broken, irregular track over the waste, interrupted every here and there by pools of water left by the last night's rain, and by black miry bogs, through which the way was difficult and dangerous; and she, who kept her head over the side of the cart, and her eyes bent upon the road, could, though often intercepted, still follow the track which the horse, in his wild paroxysm of terror, had left through the black mire and clay. The deep indentations of his hoofs were plainly to be seen, but nothing else — no trace of anything else; not the shred of a garment; not a vestige; not a footstep!

And so, over these dismal hills, and through the deep valleys, mostly clothed on each side with a rough, brambly, almost impervious brushwood that intersected them, they arrived at last where a mountain stream came rushing impetuously across the road, which was usually a brawling, and not very wide torrent, but *now* swelled by the night's rain to a deep, overwhelming river. Not only the usual bed of the stream *was filled*, but the banks high upwards were covered

n by the deluge of water which still came sweeping  
d down.

The track ended; they had arrived at the ford. There, upon the steep side of the bank, where the road terminated, the ground was all torn up, as by the hoofs of a horse struggling upwards. The miry clay was trampled over; and here, at last, the marks of human footsteps were discernible. Of different sizes and shapes, however, and but little could be made out of them, for the earth was nearly reduced to one puddle. The road lay here in a hollow way, between high banks entirely grown over with broom, gorse and brushwood, and carpeted beneath with moss and bilberries; and the narrow track between appeared recently to have been trampled over by numbers. The deep print of the horse's hoofs were, however, yet discernible, amid the indistinct and confused footsteps of men.

There the cart stopped, and the young mother sprang to the ground. And first, almost on hands and knees, she examined the track, striving to discover the footsteps of a child amid the confusion of horses' feet which had trampled over the place. But no — no such footprint was there, not one, hunt as she might. Footsteps of men, and it might be of women — but not one of a child.

"I see no child's footsteps," she said at last, sadly, to her companion.

"Dear me, no, Madam. They would never have reached the bank through that deluge of water."

"Black Bess can swim. Black Bess did reach the bank. Mr. Yates was a bold and brave rider — ay,

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and a splendid swimmer, too. I am certain they were not drowned."

And as the mother, in the faith and divination of affection, pronounced these words in a raised tone, a sort of indistinct, odd sound was heard close by, seeming to issue from an almost impervious thicket which hung over the road.

"What was that? Did you hear anything?" she said to Willmore, turning suddenly towards the place whence the sound had proceeded. And as she did so, she fancied she saw the tangled branches moving, as if some living being was concealed within.

"There is somebody there. I heard a low laugh. I saw the branches move — I am sure I did."

"Alas! Madam, the wind sings and wails wildly among the trees and hills, and blows the branches up and down. There is nothing there."

The men that had been sent out a few hours before had some time ago left this place, and had gone on, skirting the banks of the river, in hopes of discovering some vestiges of the lost ones. They were now heard returning; and the lady and her servant, uncertain what to do next, awaited their approach. They came up; they had something in their hands.

"What is that?" she called out.

"Poor Mr. Yates's hat. It has his mark in it."

"Where did you find it?"

"Low down the river. It seemed to have floated that way. It had been stopped by a bough which had fallen across the water, and so we were able to reach it. Poor man!"

"*And nothing more?*" she cried with feverish impatience, "*nothing more?*"

"Yes, Madam," said one of them, in a hesitating manner, it was the gardener, "a little child's glove, close by the water just below where my lady stands."

"Wet or dry?"

"Dry."

"My child is *not* drowned, then!" she almost shrieked. "I was certain of it."

---

But, oh! it rained and rained. The heavens were pitiless, or perhaps they poured down their torrents in sympathy with her who shed no tear. She passed that long and dreadful day, searching and searching, over and over again, the same spot.

But what could it avail? No vestige of child or man, except the little child's glove, which was found unwetted upon the bank, and the hat which had been swept forwards by the waters.

"The glove was dry," she kept repeating: "the child could not have been drowned, for the glove was dry."

"Ay, but," said Willmore, who, convinced that both Mr. Yates and the child had perished, thought it best for his lady that she should acquiesce in a belief which with him amounted to a certainty, "are you certain, gardener, that the glove *was* dry when you found it? You put it in your warm pocket directly, didn't you?"

"To my belief," persisted the gardener, "it was as dry as a bone, when Will picked it up."

"Not so," interrupted Will, "not *quite* dry, as I remember; wetted with the rain mayhap, but not *quite* dry."

"You see, Madam, the glove was *not* dry, at all," said Willmore to his lady.

"Perhaps not," said she, "might have been wet with the rain. But this glove," she added, gazing with a look indescribable at the tiny, innocent fingers, "has never been plunged in the water, I am certain."

"But, Will," persisted Willmore, well-intentioned but ill-advised, "you say it was wet when I found it."

"I say it was *almost* if not altogether *dry*," repeated the gardener.

"And I am ready to swear it was as wet as mud," cried Will, in the spirit of contradiction.

"You see, Madam," said Willmore, respectfully but promptly.

"Why will you all conspire to persuade me he drowned?" she cried out, and flung from them in a passion of tears.

---

They persisted in the search some time longer, but nothing more could be discovered. Meanwhile rain kept falling unceasingly, and as it fell, gradually obliterating the traces of the footsteps by the side of the river. Indeed it was now evident that before the arrival of the lady and Willmore, those dispatched in advance had so trampled over the spot, that no inference could be drawn from any vestiges there to be found. Still the rain kept falling, till the poor young lady was wetted entirely through; but she felt not *chill*, she was insensible to anything but the

fta absorbing object, and long was it before she could be  
tted persuaded to abandon the hopeless search for some  
zing footsteps of her child.

cent She would fain have penetrated the briery thicket  
an which overhung each side of the hollow way, regard-  
ned less of the dripping branches that poured their cold  
you showers upon her head; but the bushes seemed im-  
re pervious, and so they literally were, except to some  
ck well acquainted with certain little openings and narrow  
winding paths, which ran through them. Sometimes  
ully she clambered upon the rocky and moss-grown banks,  
e which the mountain deluge had invaded, looking wist-  
n fully over the waste of waters, rendered still more  
dreary by the lowering aspect of the sky. Then she  
would come back to the ford, and again repeat her  
examination of the ground. Vainly, indeed, not a  
trace of the infant was to be discovered.

When we have lost some precious thing, how do  
we search and search again the same spot, vainly  
hoping to find that which we have already ascertained  
cannot possibly be there. The little glove meantime  
was laid in her bosom, and seemed to warm her poor  
heart. It was to her as an assurance that her child  
still lived — an assurance in which no other one  
shared.

Hour followed hour, faint, and wet, and starved;  
still she could not be persuaded to leave the spot. At  
last poor old Willmore, quite pale and exhausted him-  
self, and his face blue with cold and fatigue, suc-  
ceeded in inducing her to re-enter the cart, and to return  
home.

He said that when the rain ceased, which it  
evidently would soon do, for the clouds began to



gather up, and a faint, cold, yellow light was dimly appearing in the west — that when the rain ceased the torrent would soon run itself down; that a man could be left to watch; and that when the water was low enough his lady could return and track the course of the subsiding water, and no doubt some other indications of the sad story would appear.

So she suffered herself to be persuaded, and got into the cart, and turned her face away from the fatal spot. It was not till she did so that she seemed fully to realise her woe. Hope, almost amounting to certainty, had kept up her spirits whilst searching; but now the search was over, and nothing found but the little glove. And she felt that he was drowned, that her darling was lying cold in the bosom of those deep waters, and that she was a childless widow upon the face of the earth.

She became very faint now, for the spirit which had supported her was extinct at last, and she sank to the bottom of the cart and lay there, feeling no longer able to sit up; and so she remained, her head resting upon a cushion, which Willmore had put under it; and, covered with a horse-cloth which happened to be there, and the cart jolting her over the rough stones; she, so delicate, and of a frame so susceptible, and her clothes all saturated with water clinging to, and chilling the very marrow of her bone but none of all this extremely suffering seemed to reach her, for her soul was absorbed in her misery. In utter darkness she lay — all around was dark *nothing but utter darkness.* No ray of light, *no hope, no life.* She could not, out of the depths *her despair,* lift up her eyes to Him who never fails

she was too entirely exhausted to do this. Oh, pray that your faith fail not! ye that lie in the temptation of deep distress, pray that your faith fail not!

In this manner they at last reached the mansion, and the cart stopped. Then she lifted up her head, and said, looking round in bewildered manner:

"Are we come home?"

"Yes, Madam," said Willmore, and seeing she did not move, for by this time she was quite stiff with cold, he tried to lift her out of the cart, but he was too weak himself; so he called for help, and the lady's-maid and the housekeeper, and a footman or two, all helping, they lifted her into the house.

Oh! as she entered that hall again, entered it for the first time, so silent and desolate, because they were all dead, how heavily sunk her heart; but she did not weep, her grief was too big for tears.

As they carried her through that noble hall, she cast up one glance at its fretted roof, all inlaid with azure and gold, and then she closed her eyes, and they thought she had fainted. Not altogether that, however, but she was all but insensible; yet her mind, poor thing, could not fall asleep.

"Carry her up, and put her in a warm bed," old Willmore next said, "for she is almost clammed altogether with wet and cold."

So they took her up, and took off her dripping garments, and laid her in her bed all — all alone — alone — alone for ever!

She was passive; she let them do as they would. The oppression of her great grief seemed to weigh her down and render her motionless, as one under the op-

pression of some mighty burden. In this state she lay a short time, and then the reaction began, and fever set in, and in the course of a few hours her life was declared to be in danger by the medical men, who stood anxiously watching at her bedside.

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Two days and two nights were spent in a low dreamy delirium; the third she awoke again to consciousness, but she was so feeble that she could with difficulty speak so as to be heard. As soon as she was restored, even thus imperfectly to herself, she begged to see Willmore.

The grey-haired old man was soon at her bedside. His old cheeks were flushed, and his eyes red with weeping, and it was with difficulty he could restrain himself from weeping aloud now when he came into his poor lady's room.

She stretched out her pale thin hand, for the eight-and-forty hours of fever had wasted her very much; and in a voice scarcely audible, so low and faint it was, asked him what had been done whilst she lay deprived of her senses.

"Everything that was necessary," he said, "had been ordered, and for the rest it only waited her directions. Everything so far, had been thus arranged as things were ordered at the funeral of his old master, the late lord, the father of him that was just gone. He supposed his lady would wish to have it so. But for the external ceremonials, he waited till she could *give her own orders.*"

"*Let it all be as it was before,*" she said, almost

with indifference — her heart was too much absorbed by her living grief, to cast much thought upon the vain consolation of funeral ceremony; "all as it was before — omit nothing. Take care all is done with the utmost respect. But it was of other things I wanted to speak to you. What news — what news?"

"Nothing to be properly called news, Madam. But —"

"The river must have returned to its bed," said she.

"It has, Madam. No more rain has fallen."

"And has nobody —" making as if she would start up herself; but she was almost too feeble to lift her hand, she sank back again, and groaned.

"We have searched the bed of the river on both sides."

"And found nothing?"

"Yes, Madam. But —"

"What have you found? Speak out! — don't be afraid. Speak out! — don't be afraid."

But she pressed her two thin hands against her heart, as she said so; for she believed something was going to be said that would kill her.

"Had my mistress not better wait a few days, before she hears any more of this dismal story?" said the old man.

"No!" she cried, with a strange violence; "tell me at once! They have found the child's dead body!" And then she began in a sort of wailing chant to cry and sing: "Oh! bring it to me — bring my cold, dead *darling to me, and let me lay him in my bosom. My*

dear — dear little boy! Ah! it is so cold, it will not warm him!”

“You mistake me, Madam — mistress. Alas! alas! we have not found the body!”

“You *have* not!” And a bright ray of joy shot from her eyes. “You *have* not! Did I not tell you I was certain my baby was not drowned? Where is the glove? — the glove! Who took away the glove?”

They held it before her; she snatched at it; spread out once more the tiny fingers, and displayed the little palm with a sort of wild triumph.

“His glove has never been in the water!” she cried; “it has *not* been in the water! A few drops of rain may have wetted it; but it has not been *dipped* in water. I am certain the child is not drowned.”

“Alas! Madam, and his little hat and feather —”

“His little hat and feather! And what of his little hat and feather?”

“That, Madam, has been found in the river’s bed.”

“Found his little hat and feather! Oh! bring it! Give it — give it to me!”

It was brought to her all shapeless, and spoiled by the effect of the water, in which it had been so long lying. The white ribbons were all stained and discoloured with mire, and the poor little feather was hanging, broken and uncurled, over the brim.

She caught it greedily in her arms, and pressed it to her bosom, and seemed as if she would devour it *with kisses*. It was like the living image of her child. *She kept kissing it passionately.* But she drew not

the same conclusion from the finding of the little hat, which the others did. For presently she lifted up her eyes, and said to Willmore:

"The hat is all spoiled by the wet; but the glove was *dry!*" And then she laid both hat and glove in her bosom; and as if the very touch of them soothed and comforted her, she fell asleep.

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## CHAPTER III.

THE Very Reverend the Dean of M — was a portly man, such as a Dean is wont to be; and, in much state and importance, he resided in the cathedral town of M —, and watched over the magnificent minster, and took very much pains as respected the voices of his choristers, and kept an excellent table, and a very handsome carriage, and performed all the duties of his station most exemplarily — that is to say, in the way those duties were performed some years ago, before a new view of the obligations belonging to their vocation had broken upon churchmen, and that very great change for the better had begun, which has made, and is still making, such rapid progress in this our day.

Dean Villars was, at the moment when I am about to introduce you to him, seated at the bottom of a table covered with the choicest delicacies, all cooked to perfection; for he was a man of refined taste in every matter which he thought worthy of his attention, from Gothic architecture, down to soufflé puddings; and was indeed generally acknowledged, by all his acquaintance, as the arbiter from whom, in all and every one of such things, there was no appeal.

The Dean loved good eating: it may be, a little for its own sake, but far more he loved it for its *accompanying glory*; for great was the glory, as he *considered these things*, of eating well. It was something

to be a Dean, and to have charge of one of the noblest cathedrals in the kingdom; it was something to have a choir second to none except the one in His Majesty's Chapel at Windsor; but it was almost more, in his eyes, to have the reputation of keeping the best table known.

It must be owned, there is taste to be displayed in the setting forth of a table, and the array of a dining-room, as well as about other things. And what with the massive plate, and what with the sparkling crystal, and what with the fine Oriental china, of the plates and dishes, and what with the real beauty of colouring displayed in the arrangement of the viands, a more agreeable picture than one of the Dean's dinners could not be well presented. And Bassano, who evidently recollected this when painting his "Marriage of Cana," would have delighted in it. He would also have found little cause to quarrel with the figure of the Dean, now seated at the foot of this table; as little with that of his lady, a handsomely dressed gentlewoman, at the head.

The Lady Marion — Westmore having been her maiden name — daughter of the Earl of Carpentas, having fallen in love, some years gone by, with the Dean's good looks when he was only a poor curate, had been allowed to bestow her hand upon him when he had been presented to two rich livings, and had added to them the title of Mr. Dean. Waiting for which, many years had elapsed, and the bloom upon the lady's cheek had somewhat faded; her fine eyes had assumed a somewhat anxious expression; and her figure, once symmetry itself, had become rather more *thin and delicate than was quite consistent with beauty.*



The Dean and his lady had now been married several years, and after a long space of time, one little daughter had blest their union. She was at this time about two years of age.

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There was a small, select party this day dining with the Dean. Among them might be seen one or two professional singers; for the Dean was a great lover of music, and sometimes took a part in a glee himself; and, be it observed, *en passant*, when he did so, the fine bass tones of his sonorous voice added greatly, in the opinion of all good people, and more especially of such as had just dined at his table, to the beauty of the execution.

There were present also, besides the professional gentlemen above alluded to, some of the principal residents of the cathedral town, or belonging to the families in the neighbourhood, and one or two beneficed clergymen of the place.

One of these last I am going to introduce you to; and I am sorry to say he is also one of the old, old school — that school which is, as I said above, fast dying out from among us, being succeeded by that earnest, fervent spirit which is the life and ornament of religion in this our happier day.

This gentleman was not, however, like Mr. Dean, a pluralist. Not that he would have been unwilling to be that, or any other *list* which would have put crowns into his purse; for his whole soul was given *up to covetousness* and base self-interest; vices which, *in his profession*, once indulged — and there is plenty

of time and leisure, if men so choose it, to indulge them — vices which cut into, canker and corrupt, the very core of the heart, and render a man's spiritual office nothing but a hideous mockery.

This gentleman was as unamiable in his external appearance, as one so corrupted at heart should rightly be. He was a dark, beetle-browed, tall, raw-boned sort of man, with a harsh voice and a harsh eye. Seldom he went among his poor. Parish visitations amid the filthy and unsightly houses which constituted the majority in that portion of the town where his cure lay, were too disagreeable to be thought of. Besides, as he often said, he really wanted time. He kept a curate to do all that sort of thing. Yes, and he allowed him fifty pounds a year, and a very handsome salary too; one had been ready to come for forty, but the fellow was an ass, and besides stuttered so horribly, that he did not think his bishop would like it. So he gave fifty pounds to Mr. Lovel, a very accomplished young fellow, forced to quit the army on account of his health, and then nearly reading himself into a decline at Cambridge; but poor fellow, success there, was his only chance in life, for he had neither fortune nor connection that he knew of, and so he had given him the curacy. And so in truth he had, and without the slightest regard as to the other's fitness for the task. But who that had seen his too bright eye, or the colour that tinted his cheek, or had heard his hollow cough, but would have deemed him as unfit as the Rector himself, to pass his days visiting among the miserable wretches that crowded the streets near the wharfs. But Mr. Lovel was a true servant of *his Master*, and not only did he perform his own

share of the duty well, but he contrived to fulfil most of that which the other left undone.

But of this curate, and of the parish under his care, more by-and-by.

The parish, indeed, lay at the extremity of the cathedral town. It included some wretched suburban streets in the neighbourhood of the wharfs which bordered the river, but it likewise stretched far into the wild and wooded country upon the northern side of the city. Most wild and beautiful this tract was composed of red sandstone and marl, with rocks and hills thickly covered by primeval woods, composed of the noble trees which, upon that substratum, usually attain to an almost fabulous size and beauty. The rocks broke forth in bold faces and precipices, forming deep valleys, which intersected these hills, the valleys being mostly traversed by clear mountain streams. The whole district was sylvan and solitary, scantily inhabited, and that chiefly by charcoal-burners or miners, these latter finding employment where the geological structure admitted of veins of various metals being formed. The whole region was, perhaps, one of the wildest, most romantic, not to say most savage, to be found in the west of England.

The inhabitants of these regions, were, at that time of day, little removed from absolute barbarism. Utterly ignorant they were of the very rudest form of Christianity, gross, brutal, and depraved. They needed, indeed, the bold and enthusiastic spirit of a reformer to carry light and civilization among them.

The portion of the country, however, which bordered upon the town of M— had not as yet, benefited by any such exertions. Nothing could exceed

st the utter rudeness and want of all common civilization,  
is of the place, when Mr. Gorhambury was first inducted  
into the living, except it may be, the state in which  
re Mr. Lovel, after Mr. Gorhambury had ministered thereto  
ten long years, found it.

Such evils multiply immeasurably by neglect, and  
no parish had been more neglected, even in those days  
to of supineness and indifference, than this.

But it is time to return to the dinner-table. There  
sits the Dean, his napkin tucked into his button-hole,  
re enjoying his turbot and lobster sauce; and there sits  
of the Rector, with his harsh, hard countenance, his black  
ly eye, and his cold but complacent smile, on the Dean's  
be right hand. He is endeavouring to unite a flattery,  
re but too agreeable to the somewhat spoiled dignitary,  
ys with the indulgence of a sarcastic spirit, but too  
is agreeable to himself — for Mr. Gorhambury was a  
ly bitter man.

And now they have taken a glass of the Dean's  
most particular Madeira, wine that has travelled from  
re tropic to tropic, and been hoarded in the spacious  
cellars of the deanery, nobody knows how long; and  
the Rector has pronounced it unrivalled, and is hold-  
ing up his glass to catch the light upon it, from the  
brilliant pyramid of waxen candles that adorns the  
centre of the table, when his servant enters the room,  
comes up to him, and presents him with a letter  
sealed with black wax, saying that it has just arrived  
by express.

"Where from? — where from?"

"From Castle Avon, Sir," the man replies, in the  
humble subdued tone, with which the reverend gen-  
tleman expects to be addressed by his inferiors.

*Castle Avon. I.*

Mr. Gorhambury started at the name, and with a "May I take the liberty?" to the Dean, hurriedly breaks the seal.

But scarcely had his eye glanced over three lines, than he started up with a suddenness that threatened to upset the table, and hastily turning to his dignified friend, said: "May I entreat a few moments' conversation with you in private?" hurriedly left the room. He was followed, with a little less precipitation by the courtly Dean, whom neither life nor death could move, to the undignified vulgarity of being in a hurry.

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When the Dean reached the library to which Mr. Gorhambury had retreated, he found him with the letter held in both hands, reading it with an almost greedy impatience — seeming as if he would devour the contents with his eyes, which were staring widely, whilst his cheek was flushed, and his hair almost on end.

"What *can* have happened, my good Sir?" asked the Dean.

"My friend — my good friend — my dear friend," replies the other, in a tone of the utmost hurry and agitation. "Something so wholly unexpected — so extraordinary — so out of all calculation — so very strange — so very *dreadful*!" he added, as if recollecting himself, whilst his eyes were sparkling with exultation, and his lips vainly endeavouring not to smile. "Something so sad — so lamentable —" *as he was running on.*

"Well, but what is it?" asks the Dean quietly.

He was a much more sensible, and a much more amiable person than his friend, as you have perhaps already discovered, and for which friend, well as he suited him in many respects, he entertained, at times, a little good-natured contempt.

"Let us know what it is — what has happened?"

"Oh! my dear friend, how shall I find words? So shocking an affair — so unexpected — so inconceivably wonderful — I declare to you, it is the very last thing I ever thought of — never looked for it in the least — never contemplated the possibility of such a thing; far from any ambitious views in that direction — believe me, I am overwhelmed — confounded."

"Well, but what is it? have they made you Archbishop of Canterbury?" asked the Dean, with a slightly sarcastic smile.

"Oh! nothing in that way — nothing of that sort at all. Preferment in that line, whether merited or not, I never anticipated. My poor nephew, you know, was not one particularly — but good heavens! such a thing as this! Why, it is not to be believed!" And he had recourse to his letter again.

The Dean began to be impatient to return to his dinner. The more so, perhaps, because after all he began to suspect that these demonstrations of emotion would end, as they had sometimes done before, in some matter of no very particular interest. So he rose from the chair into which he had thrown himself upon entering, and saying:

"Well, my dear Sir, they will be wondering what we are about;" approached the Rector, as if to force on the explanation.

"Oh, my dear friend!" cried the other, seizing his hand with much effusion, "only think — only imagine — congratul — No, no — condole. I ask for your condolence, my dear friend, indeed I do. Aylmer died last night, and — and — and his poor little son — his heir — his only child — is gone too — is drowned!"

"This is very shocking intelligence, indeed," said the Dean, gravely.

"Is it not? As I said, dreadful! awful! terrible! The poor young man — my cousin — my own first cousin's son — the nearest relation he had in the world; and the little boy — the poor little child — drowned — Tuesday night! Let me see; yes, on that terrible Tuesday night — you recollect, Sir, what a storm it was. Crossing the mountains, had to pass Dana ford — waters swelled — child and steward both drowned! Would you like to read the letter?"

"Yes," said the Dean, taking it from his hand, and sitting down to peruse it, feeling, in truth, very much shocked.

Lord Aylmer had been universally beloved, and he could not so suddenly hear of the death of the amiable young nobleman without considerable emotion. The child too — the heir. Everybody takes a certain interest in a little boy of four years old, who is sole heir to a large property. It was very — very shocking!

The Dean took out his spectacles leisurely, and began to read the letter, whilst Mr. Gorhambury, in a state of excitement he found it impossible to master, *perambulated* the room with hasty steps; the extacy, *the unbounded exultation* with which the news had

filled his bosom being unchecked by the slightest touch of genuine sympathy with so hideous a misfortune. The manifestation of his feelings, however, being a little restrained by his fear of displaying anything like indecent joy, before the man he was accustomed to look up to, and desired to stand well with.

He was as yet too new to the splendid prospects before him, to perceive that he and Mr. Dean, had, as far as worldly dignities were concerned, already changed places. One, whom he had regarded so long as his superior in every respect, he could not, all at once, bring himself to disregard.

The letter was from poor Willmore. He, all bewildered with the sudden responsibility which the death of the steward, following so speedily on that of his master, added to the violent illness of his lady, threw upon him, could think of nothing better to do, than address himself to one, whom all the world knew was, the child being no more, his master's next heir. But it had taken him, poor old man! a good many hours to collect his bewildered senses, sufficiently even to resolve upon this step; so it was not until the third day after the terrible disaster, and just as poor young Lady Aylmer was gradually being restored to her senses, that Mr. Gorhambury received the old servant's letter, which ran thus:

"Sir — or my Lord,

"As I believe I must call you henceforward, for there has been a dismal tragedy acted at this castle, and sad and dreadful is the news I take up my pen to convey.

"My dear lady, at present lying in her bed quite



delirious, and, as the doctor thinks, in a dying state, or not likely to mend at least for a long time, being unable to give orders, so that we know not what to do; we think it right, Sir, that you should be informed without delay of what has happened. Oh, Sir! you must know, our honoured, and respected, and beloved master, young Lord Aylmer, whom we doted on as the apple of our eyes, as well and truly we may say; who was never strong, as doubtless you know; took on for worse last Tuesday was a sen'night. My lady had all the doctors in these parts, and they flattered her as how he was getting better, and would come round, and all be as usual again. But, somehow, my lady was not content — the more the pity — with her own country practitioners, who must have known our dear master best, seeing they had practised on him for so many years; and she must needs send express for some great man from London, who came down in a mighty hurry in a post-chaise and four; and no sooner does he set foot in the poor young lord's chamber — I misgave him from the first, seeing he didn't half look like a great doctor, but just like another man for all the world — what do he, but say, as how all the other gentlemen has been doing is quite altogether right; but he alters the treatment nevertheless, and gives him a dose of physic, 'which,' says he, 'if it does not work its due effect, no power on earth can save him.'

"I saw Mr. Patten shake his head as he come out of the room, following the great doctor down stairs, *so he couldn't see him; and shrug his shoulders to me, as much as to say, what I understood well enough; but my young lady believed the great man. And*

weeping, and weeping, she came down stairs; and he said:

“My dear Lady Aylmer, be patient, be composed — there is still a chance.”

“Oh, do not deceive me!” I heard her say, ‘the truth — the whole truth.’ And so the physic did no good, and the next morning it was settled among the doctors, that the poor young lord must be dead in twenty-four hours; and they told him so himself — enough to kill him outright — but, as I thought, he took it wondrous firm; and so did my lady. Weeping, and weeping, and kissing him — kissing his forehead, and kissing his hands; but no screams, or hysterical like. And then that poor young couple settled to spend the short time allowed them together; but my lord wished to see his child, who was at his grand-mother’s; and so the roads being dreadful bad, besides a vast way round for a carriage, Mr. Yates, that is — that *was*, poor man, the steward, proposes he shall take a very steady mare of ours, honest Black Bess, and ride across the country, and bring the dear little gentleman home before him. And my young lady was charmed with the scheme, as thinking she should have the child in his poor father’s arms all the sooner. But you know what a storm arose on Tuesday evening. Some say a water-spout fell in the mountains, for not in the memory of man has the Dana been known to be so swelled by many, many a foot; and crossing the ford in the dark, and the river so swelled, the poor creatures were both drowned — and the Lord have mercy upon their souls! The child, sweet innocent, is gone to be an angel in heaven; and we will hope *he best* for poor Mr. Yates, who was an upright and

honest man, though somewhat stern with the poor, and especially could not abide a vagrant, a squatter, or a gipsy — such as there may be too many in these parts. But, poor creatures! what are they to do? they can't rot in a jail — but, no more of that — and rest be to his spirit, for a more faithful steward, as regarded his master's monies, never lived; and if he was hard now and then with a poor servant, why he meant it for the best — so rest be to his soul. And so, honoured Sir, as I said, all of us poor servants being at a loss what to do, we have agreed to send express to you, as being our late honoured lord's nearest relation; and, the poor young gentleman being lost, as we believe, his Lordship's next heir. And waiting your honour's commands,

“I am, obediently, your humble servant,

“My Lord,

“THOMAS WILLMORE.”

The Dean folded the letter deliberately, with this remark:

“I did not know that the title descended to collaterals.”

“Nor does it,” answered his friend, turning quickly round.

“The estate is entailed, I conclude?”

“Strictly.”

“And you stand next in the entail?”

“Unquestionably. What could make you doubt it?”

“*It is a difficult matter what to say, in a contingency such as this,*” the Dean continued, after a

pause, and rising deliberately from his chair. "One cannot congratulate a man upon a succession which falls to him under such pathetic circumstances. All I can say is — as fall the succession must upon some one — I am glad it has fallen upon you."

"Thank you, thank you!"

"And now, shall we return to the dining-room?"

"No, you will excuse me; I shall set forwards immediately: my presence must be required at the castle. I will take leave to ring the bell, and order a chaise and pair from the 'Eagle,' without delay. I shall just stop for a moment at home, to communicate the intelligence to Mrs. Gorhambury, and then hasten onwards as speedily as possible. I shall reach Castle Avon by breakfast-time to-morrow morning."

"Do you know much of the unfortunate young widow?"

"Very little — except that she was a great beauty. The poor young lord met with her in some out-of-the-way place. She was a daughter of nobody, I believe. I have seen her only once or twice; thought her an ordinary creature, but undoubtedly handsome."

"Well then, as there seems nothing more to be said, I think that I will return to the dining-room. They will be wondering what can have become of us; and the venison will be quite cold. Won't you have a slice brought in here, and another glass or two of Madeira, to fortify yourself against the journey? I shall hear from you, no doubt; and if you can make any use of me, command me."

"Thank you — thank you; I will be sure to write. *Nothing — nothing; I am too much agitated to taste*

a morsel; but a glass of Madeira — yes, if you please, a glass of Madeira."

A quarter of an hour more, and Mr. Gorhambury's chaise was heard rattling at a rapid pace from the Deanery door.

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## CHAPTER IV.

THE mourner had enjoyed some refreshing sleep that night, and she awoke pressing the little glove to her bosom, and with a sensation of renewed strength, which led to the fond hope that she should be able to rise, and renew her search that very day.

The morning broke calm and bright, and the September sun gleamed through her half-opened curtains; the pale blue mists swelled up between the trees, and their shadows fell upon the shining grass; the autumn birds were whistling and calling.

She had the night before fastened the precious little glove to a slender gold chain, and attached it round her neck; and never did Catholic with more emotion press a saintly relic to his heart, than she this little vestige of her child. And never did enthusiast with more holy hope regard his reliquary, than she hers — she treasured it as the assurance that her child lived.

In the certainty that he lived, she never wavered for a moment. She looked upon this as a most indisputable fact, and expected that all the world would regard it in the same light.

Her impatience to rise and proceed in the search, was therefore intense; and without waiting to call her maid, who was sleeping upon a sofa in the dressing-room adjoining, she determined to rise, and begin to dress *herself*, for to lie in bed quietly any longer, *seemed impossible*. So she tried to rise.

But alas! no sooner did she endeavour to do so, than insupportable pains seized her, and, with a scream of agony, she was obliged to throw herself back upon her bed.

Her maid was startled at the sound, and hurried to her. With her assistance she again endeavoured to raise herself; in vain, for the present the use of the lower limbs seemed totally lost. Once convinced of this, the poor mother, without speaking, laid herself down again, in bitter resignation; pressed the little glove more closely than ever to her bosom, turned her face to her pillow, and wept.

"Don't cry so — don't, Madam; have patience, you will soon be better."

"But time! time!" she cried out aloud, "oh, precious — precious time! And my boy! — my poor, helpless little boy! — where is he? where is he?"

The maid shook her head, and a tear was in her eye.

"And you, too!" cried the mother, with almost violence; "one and all of you — are you in a conspiracy to rob me of my child? I tell you, woman, he is alive — I am certain he is alive."

The eye of the attendant glanced involuntarily at the poor little drenched and faded hat, with its broken uncurled feather. The lady had ordered it to be hung upon the wall, close by the bed, from whence she could at all times see it.

"Yes, I know — I know. The hat was drenched, *but the glove was dry.* The hat might have fallen off *into the river*, but how could the glove be dry?"

*Alas poor thing! but was the glove dry? I every*

one but herself were satisfied that the glove was *not* dry — every one but the poor mother.

Now, the little glove was a somewhat remarkable little affair; and a prettier one never had been drawn upon an infant hand. It had been made by the proud and happy mother herself; and in fanciful imitation of the ornamented gauntlet of old days. It was of buff leather, such as riding-gloves are now made of, but of the softest and finest description that could be obtained. Lady Aylmer had lined it with blue silk and cotton-wool, and finished it like a little old-fashioned horseman's glove; it was pinked and beautifully embroidered with a tiny pattern in blue silk. And proud and happy had both mother and child been, when these gloves were worn.

It would appear that the nurse — the weather being fine when Mr. Yates and his charge set out — had dressed the little boy in his best clothes, and had put on these favourite gloves to please her lady, as she thought.

The poor thing had good reason for laying so much stress upon the circumstance of the glove being dry. It had been found close by the river, but half-hidden under a broad leaf of one of those gigantic bur-thistles which are seen by the way-side in desolate places; and this had served in some degree to shelter it from the heavy rain, so, that though it was indeed a little damped and stained, it had not been drenched, and the lining was perfectly dry, and not in the least discoloured. Evidence conclusive for her, though, as it appeared, little regarded by any one else, that the little wearer must have reached the shore.

*Will, who found it, said it was wet when he picked*



it up; and every one felt so convinced that the child was in fact drowned, that they troubled themselves not with minute details. The little drenched hat was proof enough for them.

Lady Aylmer was a woman of a strong and determined will, sweet as was the character of her beauty, and gentle and soft as was her usual demeanour. She had that good gift, which the French express by the words, *avoir du caractère*, and for which our language wants an equivalent; for when I use, for want of a better term, that of determined will, I seem to imply a something of obstinacy or wilfulness, which I do not intend. Lady Aylmer was neither obstinate nor wilful; but once convinced that she was right, she was not to be deterred from pursuing the course, her persuasions indicated.

She was neither to be flattered, nor frightened, nor tempted by indolence or secret misgivings, from following up what she thought it right and best to do.

And now, unhappy creature! behold her with her unchanging conviction that the child still lived — that in some extraordinary manner or other, it had reached the land, and on the land dropped its glove — chained down powerless, to her sick bed, and obliged in the most desperate circumstances of her life to act by deputy she, who even in the smallest circumstances, held it as a maxim that what is done by deputy is but half done.

But her clear and strong faculties did not forsake her. Her mother's love, the very intensity of that *anxiety* which would have unnerved many another, *only seemed to give additional force to her power of*

self-command; enabling her to collect her thoughts with astonishing calmness, and consider what course, under the circumstances, it would be most advisable to pursue.

So finding it impossible to quit her bed, she resigned herself to her fate, and lay for some little time collecting her thoughts and spirits; then she desired Willmore to be sent for.

The old man entered the room; aged, as it would seem, almost ten years by the events of the last two days. He looked, moreover, particularly nervous and uncomfortable. He had not in the least expected — for the medical practitioner had held out no hope of the kind — that his lady would be so far restored to herself in this short period of time, as to be able to attend to business and to give directions; and as, upon their interview of the evening before, she had not said a word about sending for Mr. Gorhambury, he felt uneasy as to the propriety of having taken that measure upon himself; and with the want of moral courage common to ordinary minds, had not ventured to mention what he had done to Lady Aylmer. So he was much humbled in spirit, and came in looking more uncomfortable than was quite compatible with the joy he ought naturally to have felt at seeing her restored to the possession of her reason. As he came up to the bedside, his wrinkled hands trembled a good deal.

“Come hither, Willmore: I have much to say to you,” she began, struggling hard to preserve the composure she had with so much effort attained. “Don’t stand, sit down; I shall talk better with you when *you are seated.*”

]

"No, Madam — pray — please — I would rather stand."

"You have taken the proper steps towards the arrangement of the funeral of my dear Lord Aylmer?" she said, steadily. "Right. But there is a matter more important than that — the child —"

"Alas! Madam, why will you flatter yourself?" stammered out the old man. "There is nothing more to be done; the stream has run down to its usual channel, and nothing can we find but the hat."

"You told me so before. The hat proves nothing. I must have stronger evidence than that, before I will be convinced that my child did not come to land."

"And what can your Ladyship think has become of him — of them?"

"*That* is the mystery; but they were not drowned. Depend upon it, *that* shore they reached. Now, Willmore, I must have better advice and assistance than you can give me, my good old man. But in the first place, I must have a reward of five thousand pounds immediately offered, and printed papers published to that effect throughout the country — throughout the kingdom — throughout the empire — throughout Europe." She went on with increasing energy, "Five thousand pounds to any one who will restore that child alive. Send, therefore, to Mr. Saxston, whom your lord once employed about some business or other. Now that poor Yates is gone, I have no one else I know to apply to — so send for Mr. Saxston."

Willmore hesitated.

"*Why* do you hesitate to obey me?" she said, *with a slight accent of displeasure.*

"Mr. Saxston has been here already, my lady, and he says —"

"Been here! And what brought him here, without being sent for?" she exclaimed, with some surprise. "Well, well, well, that is no affair of yours. If he is still in the castle, send him up to me."

Willmore obeyed instantly.

Mr. Saxston was not gone, and in about a quarter of an hour, which seemed as an age to the impatience of Lady Aylmer, a low and very humble sort of knock, was heard at the door, and upon the lady's-maid opening it, the limb of the law presented himself. He came in with a profound bow, and then, upon a sign from Lady Aylmer, approached the bed, his countenance all the time expressing the deepest grief, awe, and commiseration, that it was possible for countenance to express.

Mr. Saxston was a middle-sized man, with a lean figure, and a face that it was impossible to look upon, without a certain feeling of dislike. His keen grey eye, deep set in his head, looked out from under his contracted brows — contracted, not so much with thought, as with that kind of ingenuity which men employ to detect a puzzle — rather keenly searching what was without, then engaged with that which lay within. His mouth was thin and false — his aspect hungry, wily, and yet with a certain servility about him that was altogether displeasing.

Lady Aylmer had never seen him before, and the moment she looked upon him she was sorry he had been called. He came up to her bedside, however, with an air of such profound commiseration and respect, that the next moment she was angry at herself,

*Castle Avon. I.*

for taking such an unjustifiable prejudice against any one.

"I sent for you, Mr. Saxston, because I am deprived of the power of acting for myself; and the deplorable events of the last two days, have rendered the utmost expedition and energy necessary."

Mr. Saxston sighed, and looked down.

"You are aware," she went on with rapidity, half raising herself in her bed, and her eyes flashing with impatience and anxiety as she spoke, "that my child, my boy, has disappeared, and that we have been unable to obtain the slightest trace of him — except, indeed, this," she added, lifting up the glove from her bosom. "You observe it is *dry*. The child came to land; somewhere he is, and he must be found."

"Found!" repeated Mr. Saxston, turning his eyes, like the rest, from the glove, as of a matter of no account. "No doubt, my lady, he will be found."

"You say so!" she exclaimed, with almost a shriek of joy.

Again Mr. Saxston's countenance assumed the most lamentable expression, as he added: "I am much afraid that he will be found as it will give you little comfort to find him."

She looked stunned for a moment, at this sudden destruction of the wild hope which his first sentence had excited; then she collected herself, and, with great steadiness and seriousness, said:

"Mr. Saxston, I see you have taken up the same unfounded impression as the rest. I am convinced it is a mistaken one; and it is my firm faith that God, in *His own good time*, will restore my child to me. I *believe in His Providence*, Sir; and I do not believe

that He would have implanted this deep, this rooted conviction in a wretched mother's mind, to deceive and disappoint her. I beg, therefore, if you are inclined to undertake this business for me, that, in what you are about to do you will dismiss from your mind every impression or prejudice you may have taken up, and act in all things as though you as implicitly believed as I do, that the child lives, and has, in some mysterious manner, disappeared. Is what I honestly demand possible? Can you promise me that in this manner you will attend to my convictions, and energetically act up to them, as if they were your own?"

"I hope Lady Aylmer only does me justice in believing, that if she is pleased to confide any business to me, I shall act as if it were herself. Her impressions and convictions shall be made my own. What would she wish to have done?"

"In the first and immediate place, before you leave this house, take measures for advertising the child in every paper, of every description, in the united kingdom; and for having handbills instantly printed, and circulated as widely as it is possible, promising a reward of five thousand pounds upon recovery of the child alive."

The man of the law took care not to shake his head at what he considered, a vain and useless expense; that was no affair of his, at least.

"We must have an exact description of the young gentleman," he said; "and if he had any particular mark upon the body, by which he might be identified, it would be well —"

"What use in that? the child was only lost on Tuesday night! No! I know of no such mark. Do

you think we shall not recognise one another when we meet?" she added, with a certain contempt.

The attorney was silent, as if waiting for more; and then the poor mother, her cheek reddening and her eyes glistening as she spoke, with some impetuosity, went on:

"He is not quite four years old, but with the intelligence of a being twice his age. Large blue eyes, fair complexion, flaxen hair, hanging in large curls all round his little neck; a full mouth, like an opening rosebud; a nose of the sweetest proportions; little chubby hands and arms; limbs like transparent wax. Oh, my child! my infant! my lovely, lovely, beauteous boy!" — and she hastily sank down in her bed, and covered herself with the bed-clothes. She conquered her emotion, and uncovering her face, again looked up.

"This lovely description will do much," said the lawyer; "but it is usual in advertisements of this nature to mention clothes. Is your ladyship aware what clothes the unfortunate young gentleman had on upon this disastrous night."

"No, I am not; but it will be easy to inquire. Though poor Mr. Yates has disappeared with him, the nurse, who is still at my mother's — stupid! I quite forgot to send for her — can give us every particular of this sort. Let her be fetched instantly. When you have given directions as to this, I will see you again. There are many things, I know, which will require immediate attention — things which my dear lord confided to me during our last conversations, and particularly begged of me not to neglect.

"*I had forgotten all that,*" she said, passing her hand over her forehead; "but your presence reminds

me that there is much that is pressing to be arranged as regards this property, and which, though you are employed upon what I so earnestly and impatiently desire to see done, must be looked into without delay. I will endeavour to collect my scattered thoughts, and inform you of certain things which my dear lord looked upon as urgent, being important to the security of others, and of some matters of business connected with the estate. Had poor Mr. Yates been here, there would have been no difficulty. My lord told me that he had the threads of all these matters in his hands, but the change of circumstances will make — will make — I will try to remember all about it, whilst you are engaged in what I ask of you."

"Business! — affairs connected with the estate!" muttered Mr. Saxston, half audibly. "Would it not be better, my lady, to postpone such things until the arrival of Mr. Gorhambury?"

"The arrival of Mr. Gorhambury! And who, pray, sent for Mr. Gorhambury?"

"I understand that he is hourly expected. The express returned with the assurance that he would be here as soon as it was possible. Indeed, Mr. Gorhambury had already started in a post-chaise and four when the man left G."

"This is news to me, Sir!" said Lady Aylmer, coldly. "And pray, may I ask, were you so obliging as to send for Mr. Gorhambury before communicating with me?"

"Oh dear, no, Lady Aylmer! how could I presume?"

"Then who did?"

"I believe, poor Willmore; he really was so



frightened and put about, what with the lamentable events which had occurred, and what with your ladyship's most unfortunate illness and incapacity to give orders, that he naturally thought the best thing to do was to send for Lord Aylmer's nearest relation and next heir, and so discharge his responsibility upon him."

"Nearest relation! next heir!"

Her countenance became suddenly overcast.

For the first time the uncertainty whether her son yet lived assumed a new form. She had, in her grief at the loss, never till now adverted to the consequences of his death. It had seemed to her that her incredulity on this point — her conviction that he lived — was a matter which concerned herself alone. Alas! now, it appeared to her far otherwise. More interests were involved in the event. Her intense persuasion, her unwavering convictions, would avail her nothing. What, if she could not *prove* that her son lived? What, if the evidence which appeared to her so conclusive, should have as little weight with the world in general, as it had among her own servants? What would her passionate asseverations avail? The prospect became dark; yet amidst all that darkness, her own faith wavered not. She knew that she should find her child again; but how would it be? when? where? how?

She was silent for some time; then a ray of light broke over the prospect; and with a countenance radiant with newly-awakened hope, she turned to the attorney, and said:

"*It lies with you to prove the fact of the child's*

death, before his inheritance can be wrested from him by another."

A light seemed to flash into the attorney's brain too, at these words; he started, then recollected himself, and said, quietly and sadly:

"I am afraid the proof is more complete than your ladyship is willing to admit. No rational creature can doubt that the child perished with the steward in the waters."

"I do not admit it — I never will — I never shall. To my grave I shall carry the conviction that my child is living at this very moment."

A slight smile passed over the attorney's lips.

"I understand you," she cried eagerly; "you mean that this conviction of mine will be of no avail as regards others — be it so."

She stopped, fixed her eyes, sharpened by all a mother's intelligence, upon the attorney — eyes, that looked as if they would search his soul.

"You are acquainted, perhaps, with Mr. Gorham-bury?" she said at length.

"Slightly."

"You have known him before, it seems?"

"We have met once or twice."

"You are — to cut the matter short — his friend, perhaps?"

"That would be too great an honour to assume to myself."

"Thank you, Sir; I will not trouble you with the execution of the commission I confided to you just now. My views are altered. Let me not take up more of *your time*; I wish you a good morning."

"*Nay, Madam,*" assuming an offended air, "if you

doubt my honour — if, because I have the privilege to know and to respect Mr. Gorhambury, you do the sincere interest I take in everything that concerns yourself, you do me injustice — you do me great injustice, Madam.”

“Poor creatures, so heart-distracted as I am; but too apt to be unjust. Forgive me, Sir. I throw myself upon your candour.”

And her hand laid hold of the bell-pull. She did it with emphasis, though not with violence.

“Good morning, Sir; I am sorry to have taken your time. Letty,” as the maid opened the door, “show Mr. Saxston down stairs.”

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## CHAPTER V.

THE two men sat together in what had been the young Lord Aylmer's room of business; not his library, which was a spacious apartment, very magnificently fitted up, and filled with costly volumes; it having been left so by the late lord, a proud man, and fond of ostentatious expense. A strong contrast in this, as in many other things, with his single-minded son.

The library was, in truth, a very fine room, of grand proportions, finely ceiled and ornamented, with the book-cases only too richly carved and gilded, the tables only too beautifully inlaid and painted, the bindings of the books only too rich and splendid; a room for display, not use, with its crimson velvet and vast chairs, its carpets and stoves, and so on. The chamber in which these two men were sitting was small and simply furnished, with everything in it for use, and nothing for display, filled with the records of a good and useful life: a life such as that of this young nobleman, cut off thus in his prime, had been. There was a table of considerable size, covered with papers, tied up and docketted; his own desk upon one side of it; and the desk of Mr. Yates, who often laboured with him in works of mercy, upon the other.

Lord Aylmer had been the encourager of every plan for improving and civilizing the semi-barbarous neighbourhood in which he lived, and in all his schemes for the public good was most strenuously supported by Mr. Yates.

Perhaps that gentleman, who was of a somewhat stern and uncompromising, though most righteous nature, might be inclined to strain matters a little too far, where the punishment of vagrancy, idleness, petty depredations, and such like delinquencies were concerned. He had been brought up in a rigid school of morals — he hated vice, and detested profligacy and disorder. Even positive crime was to him almost more tolerable than the gross dissoluteness of habit which characterised too many of the people around him. Therefore, when he pounced upon any one offending in those minor matters, which he felt assured were the introduction as well as the incentives to greater disorders, Mr. Yates was, perhaps, inclined to deal rather too harshly with the culprit. At least, so thought the common people; and whilst they adored Lord Aylmer for the sweetness of his manners, the liberality of his habits, and the generous regard he showed to their best interests — they detested the steward, to whom they attributed every act of severity, however necessary or called for it might be, feeling assured that the young Lord, uninfluenced, would never have brought himself to decide upon it. In which opinion they were mistaken; for Lord Aylmer, though of a more lenient temper than Mr. Yates, knew well that to rule with a slack and negligent hand, is one of the greatest injuries a superior can inflict upon his dependants. But this by the way.

Both were now gone to their account. The young nobleman cut off by sudden illness, the steward lost *on that terrible night.*

*The two men, or gentlemen rather, for it was no other than Mr. Gorhambury and Mr. Saxston, wh*

now occupied their places, sat together and discoursed in this very room where those so different had so few days ago consulted. Oh! how was the very spirit of the place changed.

They discoursed not in the cheerful tones which had sounded in that chamber, when men were occupied with schemes for the benefit of others, with pleasant projects for the promotion of industry and improvement, and with bright prospects of progressive good.

No — these sat, their heads bent over the table, talking in low tones, scarcely audible even to each other; and this is what they were saying.

"The lady seems invincibly persuaded that the child lives," the lawyer had been observing; "and perfectly irrational as is the idea, and as such, discarded by every other living being, still this intimate persuasion may offer considerable difficulties to the arrangement of the late Lord Aylmer's affairs."

"You call it intimate persuasion, conviction, and so on," said Mr. Gorhambury, rather impatiently. "I should rather call it obstinate determination to cling to a position, and hold fast a property, to which she cannot now have the shadow of a claim."

"I wish I could see it exactly in that light," replied Mr. Saxston; "but, upon matters of importance like this, it is always my habit to deliver my impressions, however unpalatable; and I am sorry to say, that in matters of this nature, the strong, sincere convictions of one mind, will often produce an almost infectious influence upon the minds of others. And, I am persuaded that it is with a sincere conviction, and *not the affectation of it to serve a purpose, that we*

have to do here. The mother's heart is a strong thing, it will cling tenaciously to hope — even to the impossible, as it appears to others — and that with an energy of persuasion which sometimes ends in affecting the opinions of the most incredulous. I declare to you, Sir, upon my honour, absolutely convinced as I am that the child is drowned, convinced of this fact as every reasonable creature must be, still whilst Lady Aylmer was passionately repeating her own convictions, I could scarcely keep myself from being moved by them.”

At this, Mr. Gorhambury lifted up his large, dark, hard eyes, and fixed them upon the speaker with an expression in which displeasure and astonishment were almost equally mingled. The few words he uttered were:

“If such be the bent of your mind, you are not the man for me.”

“I beg your pardon; you altogether misconceive the drift of my argument. I only intended to say, that if such an effect could by possibility be produced upon me, who am as *certain* the child is drowned as if I had seen it, what may we not have reason to apprehend, should the poor lady persist in her incredulity, and offer obstructions to your obtaining possession of that, which by all laws divine and human, is now your own.”

“Pooh!” said Mr. Gorhambury, with some contempt, “what could she do? The child is dead. It is evidently her interest to retain possession — as she *seems pretty much determined to do* — but this is so *palpably and evidently absurd*, that I cannot have a *moment's apprehension upon the subject.*”

The lawyer seemed to put on his considering-cap, and after twisting his mouth and pulling his face into every conceivable wrinkle which would demonstrate profound thought, he said:

"The case is a new one. I am not aware that any such has occurred before; but I will consult my books — I will consult my books —"

"And supposing it were a new one, as you say," replied Mr. Gorhambury, with a good deal of acerbity of tone, "can that make any difference? Why, an heir might be kept out of possession to all eternity in this way, by a foolish and envious woman. Absurd! The child is lost, drowned, or otherwise made away with; what matters it? The child is gone, and I remain the undeniable heir. Besides, who is to oppose me? I am in possession now, and upon what principle on earth can I be disturbed?"

"I don't know what the means, or powers may be, which Lady Aylmer possesses for establishing the claims of her son; but of this fact I feel assured — her persuasion that he still lives is so intimate, that I am convinced every obstruction she can make, will be made."

"She had better take care, she had better look well, before she involves herself in a fruitless contest of this kind. My dispositions at present are very friendly towards her. She may be more dependant upon them than she is aware. The exact conditions of her marriage settlement I am ignorant of; but I know the old lord set himself violently against the match, and, as I heard at the time, made a very slender provision for his future daughter-in-law."

*"But I fancy the young lord rectified this by his*



will. At least, from a few words dropped by Lady Aylmer just now — when, upon a second interview, I carried her the advertisement I had drawn up, and ventured upon some representations, as to the large sum of five thousand pounds reward — telling her that, as it was offered by herself alone, she might be called upon to be answerable for the whole — she only replied: ‘Have no uneasiness upon that score, my dear Lord Aylmer has taken good care that I shall never want for five, nor for ten thousand pounds.’”

“No will, however, has been found — for, as my most sacred duty demanded, I have made every inquiry upon the subject. Old Willmore could only tell me, that if there was a will, it was made, he doubted not, by Mr. Yates, who was a lawyer by profession, and was accustomed, it seems, to draw up legal documents for his master.”

“Ten to one then, even should the will be found, that it will prove not worth a rush,” said the attorney, turning up his nose. “Old women’s nostrums, and lay law — much the same thing — much the same thing.”

“But you forget, Mr. Yates was a lawyer by profession.”

“Does not much help the matter; and yet I own I wish there may be no will, for the lady, if she have money, may manage to give us a good deal of trouble.”

“As how? explain.”

“Does Mr. Gorhambury forget,” drawing closer to *him* and looking him steadily in the face, “the *damning fact*, that the body has not been found.”

"How could it, when it has no doubt been swept into the sea?"

"Ay, ay, not the slightest doubt of the *fact*; but the evidence, the point of law, how far the death can be considered proved, so as to convey the property to the next heir, when the body has not been found, that is the question."

And again he puckered up his face into every conceivable wrinkle.

"I wish the body could be found."

"So do I, with all my heart, and it is the only possible way that suggests itself to me of solving the difficulty. For," added he, in a lower and confidential tone, taking hold of Mr. Gorhambury by the arm, a familiarity which that gentleman somewhat proudly repulsed, "that the testament will turn up somewhere or other, I have no doubt; and, if the lady have power given by it — which I doubt not to a considerable degree she has — the trouble she may give will be infinite. I don't see my way through it — I don't see my way through it, unless the body could be found."

"Is it utterly out of the question, that the body may yet be found?" asked Mr. Gorhambury. "Only three days have elapsed. The search being entrusted to servants most probably was negligent —"

"I think it is not impossible that the body may *yet* be found," said the lawyer significantly.

Mr. Gorhambury suddenly lifted up his eyes: a rapid glance of intelligence was exchanged between the two men — a glance which Mr. Gorhambury could not but understand, though he tried hard, then, and *thenceforward*, and to the end of his days to forget

it — but he could not. He dropped his eyes as hastily as he had raised them, and Mr. Saxston went on.

“The lady has offered five thousand pounds for the production of the living child. Are you inclined to give as much for that of the body of the dead one? I don’t mean,” he went on, observing Mr. Gorhambury change colour; and, from the sudden flush of dark red which had suffused his cheek and temples, when their eyes met, turn black and pale. “I don’t recommend that such a reward, should be published in the open manner Lady Aylmer is doing. But might I be assured — am I at liberty, privately to assure any man, *sub rosa*, that five thousand pounds, will by you be paid down, to be divided in equitable shares, among all, and any, who may be instrumental in discovering the child’s dead body?”

“Ye-es — ye-es — you may —” in a smothered half-inaudible tone.

Mr. Saxston turned aside, took up pen and paper, and hastily wrote a few words.

“Then Mr. Gorhambury will, perhaps, sign this. I do not,” he went on, as he held the paper in his hand, “all that is sacred forbid that I should ask Mr. Gorhambury to put his name to any paper, that can in the least degree compromise his high and holy character or calling. This paper, even if produced — and I swear solemnly never to produce it — could not throw the slightest imputation upon his rectitude and fairness. Every man in his circumstances, must be most anxious to have the mystery cleared up, and, in taking possession of an estate like this, to be assured *that he is not wronging a living child.* What can be

e natural, what more right, than such a manner  
inking.”

“Then why not do it openly?” muttered Mr. Gor-  
bury.

“Because it might have a bad effect; because, if it  
e to a jury — which sooner or later, if the lady  
the means, rest assured it will — it might have  
d effect, it might discredit even the identity of the  
y. Lady Aylmer would not believe, even if she  
the body drawn out of the water, changed and  
coloured as it must be —”

Mr. Gorhambury began to look sick and disgusted.

“All I mean is,” continued Mr. Saxston, “that with  
a determination to oppose as I fear we shall find  
ady Aylmer, a question might be raised, *even* if the  
y — which I hope and believe it will yet be —  
e produced. And she might bring the matter to a  
; and in that case, it strikes me that it would not  
: well for the heir-at-law to have put forth an ad-  
isement, and offered a reward of this description;  
roceeding which the mother had judged to be un-  
ssary — nay, undesirable: these are my reasons.  
! Mr. Gorhambury sign the paper?”

Mr. Gorhambury took the pen which the attorney  
ented, but he still hesitated.

“If that paper is signed,” said the lawyer, “I will  
ge that the body will be found; and,” he added,  
low tone, “if there be no will, Mr. Gorhambury  
stablished in his rights at once. Sign, Sir, and  
: the rest to me.”

have seen the signature: it put me in mind of that  
uy Fawkes *under pressure* of the torture, so rough  
*unsteady* was the handwriting. The paper was

signed, however, and without turning his head towards him, Mr. Gorhambury reached the paper to the solicitor, who thereupon rose, and immediately left the room.

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Mr. Gorhambury could not rest that night.

It was past midnight, and the whole of the castle was profoundly still. Deep sleep, the sleep of sorrow and exhaustion, had fallen upon all the domestics; relieved, by the arrival of one asserting authority among them, from their perplexities and anxieties. For those who are accustomed to be directed, and to obey others, seem to lose the faculty of going alone, and acting for themselves in emergencies; they are lost and bewildered, when there is no longer a controlling hand.

So one and all of the household, who had been unable to rest in peace for the three preceding nights, now wearied out, and heavy with sadness and grief, slumbered profoundly. Even poor Lady Aylmer slept. The doctor had given her a sedative draught, without her knowledge, indeed; for she, impressed with the importance of the crisis in which she stood, would have wished, though at the cost of a sleepless night, to preserve her faculties alive for reflection. The medical man, however, judged differently, and a pretty considerable dose of morphine had triumphed alike over grief and anxiety.

Everybody slumbered but Mr. Gorhambury; but he had murdered sleep.

*What he had done — the recollection of that glance from the attorney, clung to him with the tenacity of*

the fatal garment: he could not shake it off. Fain would he have satisfied himself with the assurance that it was fancy, unfounded, simple weakness, nervous agitation; that the man was an honest man: that he never thought or intended wrong.

It would not do. The instinct within insisted that wrong was intended, some deception, some trick, to say the least of it.

Well, and if there were a little deception practised, that vile casuist which is the devil's advocate within a man's breast began to say, well, and if there were, nothing worse is intended than to prove a fact which has unquestionably taken place, and establish a right without controversy in the eyes of the law, which is already full established in *foro conscientiae*, in the eyes of all just and reasonable men. Mr. Gorhambury could not have been a member of his sacred profession so long without possessing an enlightened conscience so far as the perception of what was right or wrong went; but alas! for him, he had unholy hands, and a seared and hardened heart. He could not have indulged his pride, and his covetousness, and his love of this world so many years, whilst pronouncing condemnation upon them every Sunday, without having lost all the vitality of the moral sense, all the purity and singleness of the will. Every day of his life had been a covert breach of his Christian profession; but enough of the memory of what was right remained to render him an uncomfortable, though an unsoftened sinner.

To do him justice, however, it must be acknowledged that his conviction of the death of the child was as complete as conviction could be. We are all

easily to be persuaded the way our interests incline. The mother could not be more determined in her unbelief, than was Mr. Gorhambury in his certainty, that the child had perished, and that he was the rightful owner of this large property, long and enviously coveted.

To have his title disputed, and upon such vague and unsatisfactory reasons, on account of difficulties — he could not, and would not call them doubts — which might never by possibility be cleared away; to have this fine property fall into the clutches of the law, and be finally swallowed up in the interminable labyrinths of Chancery, might have been enough to vex many a better man.

He was dissatisfied, little delicate as was his mind, with what had passed; and yet when he asked himself whether he would retract the consent, I have spoken of, bluntly answered, what could he have done better?

Whom did he wrong? Whom did he defraud, but a set of hungry lawyers who would have fastened like vultures upon this rich inheritance, by thus allowing Mr. Saxston — to do what? Obtain evidence — fair, undeniable evidence of the child's death.

Well, what harm is there in that? persisted the demon within. And then he managed, as it were, to distend himself so as to hide what Mr. Gorhambury knew was to be hidden — namely, the certainty he himself felt, that it was by unconfessed means that Mr. Saxston intended to carry his point.

So thus dissatisfied with himself, nervous, restless, uneasy, his conscience tormenting, and doubts and fears invading him on every side, Mr. Gorhambury kept walking up and down his room.

Suddenly, a new and more horrible thought presented itself. The Lady Aylmer! What if she should after all possess the means? what if she should still persevere in her incredulity, take legal measures to disprove his evidence, and discover — Expose him! disgrace him, perhaps! Oh, how he wished now that he had stood firm against Mr. Saxston's persuasions: then that paper! — the damning evidence of that paper glared like a spectre before his eyes! How could he have been so mad, so infatuated, as to trust such a document in the hands of one of whom he thought so meanly — so ill?

The irritation, of his anxiety became intolerable. In such temperaments as Mr. Gorhambury's, irritation once excited, is apt to mount to a degree perfectly insupportable. Unrepressed and unsoftened by the influence of higher and better feelings, to be vexed, as it is called, at one's self, drives the patient half mad.

The room seemed to stifle him. He opened the door; it led into a large corridor overlooking the hall and running upon three sides of it, into which the doors of the several bed-rooms opened. Upon the side exactly opposite to the one in which he now stood was the late Lord Aylmer's room.

The young nobleman was lying there in a sort of state. The day had been too hurried and busied with many things for Mr. Gorhambury as yet to have visited the remains of his young kinsman. A sudden impulse led him to resolve upon doing it now.

I do not know how it was, whether he felt as if there might be something in the aspect of death to calm the agitating contentions of his spirit; or whether *it were a sudden wish and curiosity to see one whom*



he had rarely seen, and to whom, by the very circumstance of being his heir, he now felt bound by a sort of close and peculiar tie — I know not and it matters not.

A moment he paused. He stood there with his candle in his hand, irresolute. Then he looked down into the dark, dim hall, filled with various trophies of hunting or of war, and where the banners of departed worthies were hanging in a sort of sullen pomp.

The great hall clock went tick-tack, tick-tack, measuring unheeded time. Not a sound was to be heard. The profound, the intense weight of utterly unbroken silence pressed upon him, and a sort of mysterious horror crept over his spirit. But by a sort of infatuation, this very horror seemed to draw him towards the chamber of death. He crept stealthily along the corridor, reached, and laid his hand upon the door of death's chamber.

He listened before turning the lock — all was quite — quite still. He opened the door, and the solemn aspect of death was before him. The bed upon which the coffin lay, was an antique bed with heavy, green velvet curtains, sweeping, and indeed lying in heavy folds upon the floor. Plumes of feathers crowned the angles of the cornices; upon the mattress was spread a velvet pall which, ornamented with the escutcheons of the deceased, swept the floor. On this was placed the open coffin covered with black velvet, richly ornamented, and lined with white satin, and a fine sheet of fair linen concealed the form within. The room was lighted with huge wax tapers, which threw quite a blaze upon this dark furniture of death.

A door at the other end of the apartment was

open. It led into another chamber, which had indeed been Lady Aylmer's dressing-room; and here the attendants in charge, some upon sofas, and others in arm-chairs, might have been seen in different attitudes of repose, and all fast asleep.

Mr. Gorhambury was not a man of an imagination easily affected, yet there was something in the profound stillness of the scene, the funeral array — the blazing lights — living lights blazing there all alone, around the dead, like living lamps in a sepulchre, which struck him forcibly; and with noiseless steps, and something like reverence and awe in his aspect, he approached and lifted up the sheet, to gaze upon the face of the dead. There it lay in its breathless impassibility, that waxen mysterious image, which at once is and is not — he who has been.

The beautiful countenance of Lord Aylmer lay there white as the sculptured marble upon a tomb, his fair hair flowing round it, his features displayed in all their exquisite proportions, wrapt in what appeared a sort of extatic repose.

He looked upon him — that hard, worldly, interested, heart-seared man, looked upon him with a sort of envying wonder. Would his end be like this? Would he repose in this tranquillity of the blessed? Would he when, in his turn, he lay, perhaps upon that very bed, and in that very state, would his face, be, as it were, an earnest of a world of just men made perfect, where the blessed dwell?

Thoughts akin to these rarely visited this world-hardened man; but they came now, with a sort of sad solemnity; and something softer, better, purer, seemed to *allay the vexation* of his labouring spirit.

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So he stood; and, oh; divine influence of the chamber of death, at last his knees began to bend. An inclination rare, rare with him — churchman alas! as he was — stole over him: his better angel seemed to whisper, and he was sinking into the attitude of secret prayer, when alas! alas! as his foot moved the heavy fold of the velvet curtain, a something white — a paper — two or three papers — caught his eye.

They seemed to have been shuffled together under the bed, by those who had cleared the room. It was a trifling circumstance enough; but a slight one could divert the thoughts of those so little accustomed to the higher influences as was Mr. Gorhambury. He paused, and was restored at once to his old world as he thought, *realities*. After a moment, he stooped down to take up the paper. It was an opened letter upon which he first laid his hand. A canal report, or something of that nature: he let it fall. Then seeing that its appearance disfigured the solemnity of the apartment, he pushed it with his foot under the velvet valance. As he did so, he inadvertently struck on the end of another folded paper. Oh! why — why? He never knew why: it was his fate — his destiny.

Every accident is fate, is destiny to the man who has not virtue and constancy of will enough to carve out his own. His fate, his destiny, impelled him to stoop — to draw out the fatal paper. It was the will.

Lord Aylmer, on that day when he lay dying, had in his desire to set his house in perfect order before his departure, requested his wife to bring the will that he might glance over it again. Satisfied with the examination, and wishing to make no change, he had

laid it upon a table that stood by the head of his bed, and which was nearly covered with various papers and open letters. In the confusion and distress of the subsequent night, these papers had been disregarded. When the men came to arrange the coffin and the bed, the table had been carelessly removed: some of the papers had been carried with it into the next room; others had fallen upon the floor, and had been kicked by one of the undertaker's men out of the way under the bed.

And thus the will got into Mr. Gorhambury's hands.

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## CHAPTER VI.

THE prayer which had been rising to the man's lips died away, and with it every better sensation which the view of the dead body of the young and beloved Lord Aylmer had excited. His thought, like a relaxed and unstrung bow recovering its natural form, flew back to the world, and to what he considered as its true realities, in a moment. The Yes — there was no doubt of it; it was the will of the late Lord Aylmer which he held in his hand, with it consequences the most weighty and far-reaching. His first thought was only that of surprise at having discovered the important document in this unexpected way, and his first impulse honest and natural one, to call up the sleeping attendant from the other room, and immediately transfer the paper to Lady Aylmer.

The temptations of the devil may be compared to the insinuating of a wedge. A small, almost unperceptible breach is made in the integrity of a man's heart; gradually, and almost insensibly, the breach widens, till the adversary, all successful, no longer keeps terms, but hammers and drives away, and the whole moral being is shivered into irretrievable fragments.

First, Mr. Gorhambury thought there was no immediate occasion for haste. He would himself do *the will in the morning*. It would be a gracious *of introducing himself* to Lady Aylmer, whom he

not yet seen. Then the idea stole over his mind that it might be as well the will were not at present seen in his hand. One of the sleepers in the next room might awake — might now be awakened — might be watching him. He glanced at the open door with a suspicious, nervous eye; but there was nothing to apprehend, as he thought, in that quarter. From the place where he sat he could discern no one; consequently, he argued that no one could see him. So he rose up, put the will within the breast of his coat, folded it closely over, and then, like a thief and a criminal, with a step stealthy as that of Macbeth when about to commit the murder, already guilty in thought, he stole out of the chamber of death, as completely a slave to the temptations of the present life, as if death were not — as if a future were not — as if judgment on unrighteous doers was not — and as if no lesson were to be read in the great mystery he had just before been contemplating with such emotion.

He got safely and unobserved into his own room, though his hand did tremble, and the snuffers and extinguisher rattled against his silver candlestick, making a noise that seemed to him almost startling in the dead silence of the hour. He got safely back, however; and shutting his door with the utmost caution, noiselessly drew the bolt. And then the first thing he did, with a strange feeling of terror, and as if some spectre was walking behind him, was to look under the bed — to hold up the curtains — to peep behind the bed — under the drapery of the dressing-table — into every closet and corner — once over, twice over, still holding the will under the breast of his coat; and *when he had thus*, at last, satisfied himself that no

living creature could by possibility be there, a prey to nervous terror, he still took one other precaution. He went and examined the key-hole, but the key was upon his side of the door; then he stooped down to see that the door fitted below, at the side, above. Then he again looked behind the window-curtains twice over; he looked to be certain that no one could be gliding behind them. At last he was satisfied that no mortal eye did behold him. He sat down with an air of relief and satisfaction, and after the pause of a few minutes, took out the fatal paper.

I shall not stop to turn your attention to the practical atheism of this man's behaviour. To be such an abject coward as regarded his fellow-creatures, and thus entirely insensible to other terrors, speaks for itself. Probably all criminals are atheists of the same description. This man professed to believe, and believed he did believe, in a God; and yet, when he had locked his door, and twice looked under and behind the bed, and twice lifted every window-curtain, and twice examined every closet and corner, he sat down secure, as if there were no other eye in the universe, to perform deliberately a base and treacherous action.

Step by step we go on!

He knew he had no business even to keep possession of the will, for an hour, far less to examine its contents; but it might be of the greatest consequence to his interests to be made acquainted with these said contents, and there could be no great harm in just looking over it!

*Touch not! taste not! handle not!*

*So he took it out from under the breast of his*

it, and, as he did so, I wish you could have seen  
man. Alone as he was, what a mean, despicable,  
ug-dog look he had! He held it a little while, his  
s fixed upon the superscription: "The last will and  
ament of Claribert, Lord Aylmer." The letters  
an to swim before his eyes, so intently he looked  
n them. Then, his hand shaking so that the  
le paper shook, he slowly unfolded it, and began  
ead. He had not proceeded far before his hand  
me more steady. He found reason, as he thought,  
e very glad that he *had* read it. His conscience  
ht not be satisfied, but his understanding was. He  
done a very wise thing, in straining a point to  
e himself acquainted with the enemy's position,  
further he read, the more he congratulated him-  
upon having thus become master of the facts with  
ch he should have to contend: The weight and  
ortance of the intelligence thus obtained seemed,  
is coarse perceptions of right and wrong, in some  
ee to justify the means.

In short, the perusal of the will informed him,  
by it Lord Aylmer constituted Lady Aylmer sole  
dian of his son, and sole executrix of his will.  
l, in consideration, as it was stated, of her very  
ll settlement, bequeathed to her the sum of ten  
usand pounds in money, and an annuity of two  
usand a year charged upon the estate. The landed  
erty was entailed, and came to the young Claribert  
a matter of course. The whole of the remainder  
his possessions, with the above exception, and  
ous legacies to his dependants, was left without  
tation of any sort to his son, when he should  
e of age, until which time Lady Aylmer was to



have the entire control over it, with power to apply any part, portion, or even the whole in any manner she should think best calculated to secure her son's interests.

It appeared, however, by the tenor of the will, that in case of failure of the direct heir, by the arrangements made by the old lord in his disapprobation of his son's choice, all this large personal property would, instead of being shared by the wife, devolve to the daughters; and, in case there were no daughters, follow the same course as the land, and go to the heir-at-law. So that, except under this will, Lady Aylmer could lay no claim to any portion of it.

The amount of the property as appeared by a schedule attached to the document, was such as perfectly to astound Mr. Gorhambury: so very greatly did it exceed his expectations. It appeared that the old lord had been a good manager, and a saving, ambitious man; for besides this great personalty, considerable estates had been purchased by him, all of which, however, were strictly entailed. The sum left to Lady Aylmer, therefore, was all that the young lord could strictly call his own; but there was a right reserved upon some of the old family property to make a settlement upon a wife, and of this to its full extent Lord Aylmer had availed himself.

The will, therefore, placed in Lady Aylmer's hands at once, both the authority and the means to dispute the question as to the right of entry of the next heir.

*True, Mr. Saxston seemed to hold out the hope that a body might be discovered, and the death of the*

child be proved; but how uncertain was such proof, and what endless questions might arise under this will!

Then the inheritance! What property! what power! what dignity! what heaps of untold wealth lay almost within his grasp! were his in all equity and right; and yet, by the powers given under the will, they might be disputed, and himself, after being ruined with the contest, be worsted at last. Such are the uncertainties of the law, and such were the real difficulties of the question. Whereas, situated as she now was, helpless and almost penniless, how could she enter into an expensive litigation, and attempt to disturb him in the possession he had obtained?

He sat there, holding the will in his hand, and perusing and re-perusing its rather singular arrangements; and the more he perused it, and the longer he looked upon that golden schedule of property, which, to do him justice, he really did believe was rightfully his own (for of course he believed, what everybody but Lady Aylmer believed, that the child was drowned) the more forcible did those casuistical arguments appear to him which the demon within kept urging.

The reflection that finally settled the matter with him was this: he should inflict no injury upon Lady Aylmer. True, he had reason, he thought, to look upon her as his enemy; but what of that? He would act by her in the most strictly honourable and liberal manner. Probably she might be acquainted with the dispositions of the will. If so, he would insist upon fulfilling them to the letter, so far as her legacy and annuity were concerned.

*It was just possible she might be ignorant of what*

her husband's intentions had been; in that case, still more faithfully would it become him to fulfil them, to act the liberal, the *generous* part.

Yes, he would conscientiously adhere to the intentions of the young Lord Aylmer. Not but what the allowance was very large for a woman brought up with the habits and expectations of the young Lady Aylmer. But what of that? he would not wrong her of a sixpence; no, not for worlds!

He sat there considering the matter over till he really began to look upon himself as a very generous — nay, as a rather ill-used man, to have so large an annuity to pay. But it should be paid without grudging — yes, every sixpence of it.

As for destroying the will, this was beginning to assume an aspect of an indifferent action — one imperiously demanded by the circumstances, and that could, by possibility, injure no one — nay, must prove an advantage to every one concerned, Lady Aylmer herself included, as she would thus be spared the temptation, with the possibility, of running herself into a course of endless and expensive litigation.

Indeed, altogether, the matters were so excessively complicated by this absurd will, and her absurd obstinacy, that there really was no other rational course to pursue.

It was disagreeable — certainly, very disagreeable — but what could a man do? very hard upon him, to be placed, by the unreasonable conduct of others, and the intricate involvement of circumstances, in such a dilemma. There are occasions, however, in life, when *a sensible man* must be able to discard, to hold himself above minute scruples.

Should *he*?

He arose from his chair irresolute. He laid his hand upon his candle — lifted it up — looked round.

Suddenly, the fire, which had been heaped up for the night, fell in with a loud noise, startling him, and making him tremble and turn pale.

Then it burst into a blaze again, illuminating the whole room. What a large fireplace it was; and what a heap of coal the housemaid had laid on.

The opportunity! now, or never!

If he kept the will in his possession, how dangerous! If he gave it up, how ruinous! What weakness! what folly! not to dare. And after all, what was there in it? Who would be hurt by it? She should have every farthing of her annuity: she should have more, she could afford it, she should have more. Three thousand a-year! four thousand! and one of the houses to live in, if she wished it! Everything to make her comfortable and happy.

And the blaze mounts up fiercely, for a thick paper has caught fire.

It blazes up so high, that it threatens to catch the chimney. A great heap of blazing soot comes tumbling down. Heavens and earth! the chimney is on fire!

No, no — all safe.

"What a fool I was!" and he takes the shovel and sweeps down what remains of the blazing soot; and it mingles with all that remains of the ashes of the lost will and testament of Claribert Lord Aymer.

It was done. The soot and the ashes of the paper together, almost extinguished the fire.

He took his candle, and looked anxiously among the embers, to see whether any vestige of papers destroyed could be detected, when the ashes should be removed the next morning.

It seemed to him that there was a good deal of the ash of burnt paper, still to be traced mingled with the soot and ashes from the grate. And the fire seemed to be going out. He must light it up again. Some wood and abundance of coal ashes being lighted again, every remnant would be consumed.

Some wood! But where was he to get wood in order to renovate the fire?

"My kingdom for a horse!"

Oh, for wood!

There was wood in a large basket standing at the end of the corridor; but he dared not leave the room for his life. He trembled at the very idea.

Within the room with the door locked he felt safe; but he would not have stepped out of it at that moment, no, not to — to — win his soul back again.

So he went prowling about the chamber, opening one closet, or drawer, and another, but they were all empty.

At last, oh, mercy! in a remote corner of the closets, he found a few bundles of the wood used by housemaids for lighting fires, which in the obscurity he had overlooked.

Oh! did he not seize upon it with transport! and did he not lay it on the ashes, and light it, and heap *up with coals!* and make a great big blazing terrible *fire, enough to consume every vestige of his iniquity!*

And then, his hands black and defiled, but not so blackened and defiled as his heart; his face scorched, his temples throbbing, the masses of his coarse black hair all tangled in disorder; he raised himself at last from his knees before the fire-place, and stood up — that tall dark man in black — and looked!

He was startled at himself, as he saw his whole figure thrown out by the fire which blazed furiously, and reflected in a long dressing-glass, which stood opposite. .

However, there was nothing more to be done. Every trace of the recent action was effaced, so he went and washed his hands; and then he was alarmed at the blackness of the water, and he was afraid that this strange blackness might excite suspicion — look odd, at least. What should he do with it? It was some time before the simple expedient of emptying the basin out of the window suggested itself. At last he bethought himself of that, and went and opened the shutter with much caution.

“How is it with me, when even a noise appals me!”

He was much afraid lest any one should hear him undoing the shutter, at that strange hour of the night. However, he was managing to effect it without noise, when suddenly, the bar fell with a dreadful clatter. He stopped — listened — his heart beating up into his throat, but all was quiet. He unclosed the case-ment, and then he looked out into the night — the still, holy night.

*“Oh, holy night, with what pure dignity  
Walk’st thou thy vigil through the stilly air.”*

There was no moon; but a slight frost had rendered the stars peculiarly brilliant, and there they shone forth in all their spangled hosts; glittering and shining over the wide cope of the universe! Telling of majesty, of vastness, of infinity!

And he stood a moment, awe-struck before the calm grandeur of the scene — of star-spread heaven above, and dim glimmering, wide-extended earth beneath. Awe-struck, and his heart rising and expanding — even *his* heart expanding, before the majestic silence. Even *his* heart! swelling to Him, the great author of all this mighty vision — Him! his God! Shall *he* find him? It was but the delusion of a moment. The thought of what he had done — of what he was — suddenly came over him, and the miserable man sank down upon his knees, bent his head upon his low, out-spread hands — miserable, miserable man — and wept. But sad feelings are soon exhausted. No blessing fell upon those tears, wrung from him by the sudden emotion of the moment: there was no true compunction, no availing penitence in them!

In a few seconds Mr. Gorhambury had risen again, had fetched his wash-hand basin, emptied it — carefully holding it far out, so that not a trace of his having done so should remain on window-sill or wall — and then he closed the window, and the shutters, and dropped the curtain, and left the holy and beautiful night to walk out her vigil alone. Whilst he, taking out his watch, and perceiving that by this time it was three in the morning, was seized with a fresh terror, lest anything should happen, and he should be found *watching*. So he cast off his clothes in a great hurry and hastened into his bed, and there he lay in a

strange confusion of thought, half-asleep, half-awake, wearied and exhausted — his recollection becoming confused and dreamy, yet retaining the impression in every change of thought, that something or other terrible had happened, and that he was an altered man.

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## CHAPTER VII.

THAT night another man, still meaner and more contemptible, was busied upon the affairs of Mr. Gorhambury, or rather, upon his own.

Five thousand pounds! What an immense sum that appeared to his imagination! He would have bartered his soul for it. But he was not going to peril that article at all, as he thought. Mr. Saxston possessed a very accommodating conscience, and easily argued himself into the conviction, that the deceit he was resolved upon practising, was the most innocent little contrivance in the world — such as would benefit everybody concerned, and himself in particular.

So, after leaving the apartment in which he had been closeted with Mr. Gorhambury, he walked forthwith to the stables, and taking out his horse, mounted that most quiet of four-footed creatures, and took his way, pondering, as the animal fell into its usual jog-trot pace, upon the means of carrying his purposes into execution. Mr. Saxston had a cool, clear head of his own, and he soon arranged the business to his mind, and laid out his plan of proceedings.

The first object was to ascertain, by his own most careful personal search and examination, that the real body of the lost child was nowhere to be found; the second, that the reward offered by Lady Aylmer did *not produce* the astounding effect of causing the little boy to be brought forward alive. There seemed no

conceivable reason, if the child were actually a matter that appeared quite incredible — should not already have been produced. Even the offer of so large a reward, every one must be sure, from the well-known liberality of Lord Aylmer, that any one bringing their lost son largely recompensed. Mr. Saxston, therefore, was self pretty certain that nothing would result but Aylmer's exertions, and that the child, alive, would never appear again. The body, he he doubt, had been swept by the torrents of last night, far out to sea. If so heavy a corpse of the steward — and no one doubted for an instant that *he* had perished — could have been thus away, how much more might the remains of a child, between three and four years old, be blown down? A few days would settle the matter and led the production of the living child. If he appear very soon, most certainly he would appear more. It was necessary to Mr. Saxton's that four or five additional days should elapse before he discovered the body; he had, therefore, plenty of time before him.

The river in which the catastrophe had happened rose in the mountains, upon the skirts of which was the hereditary domain of the Aylmers lay; and traversing a tract of desolate moorland, at times by the almost impervious thickets which clothed it, and now dashing between scarped precipices among cataracts over broken rocks, made its way to the large river, or rather estuary, which is on the western side of our island. The torrent, from the nature of its course, liable to great

## CASTLE AVON.

when heavy rain fell, or the snow melted upon  
s; but such a sudden rise as that which had  
lace upon the fatal night in question had not  
own within the memory of man. A water-  
it was supposed — and, indeed, this proved to  
een the case — had fallen in the mountains  
ttle distance from its source, and had poured  
is sudden deluge of waters.

evening was not yet closed, but the sun was  
towards the west, when Mr. Saxston rode out  
table-yard at Castle Avon. Heavy clouds hung  
a western sky, and the short rays shed a yellow  
eneath, showing forth the varied outline of the  
mountains; the lowlands being already darkened  
adow.

turned his horse's head towards the desolate  
and pursued his way to the ford.

first thing he did, when he arrived there,  
dismount, fasten his horse to a tree, and set  
t most rigorous examination of the spot. He  
hat the tracks of the horse's feet, which had  
en the first night upon the steep, miry ascent,  
directly from the ford, had been all obliterated,  
so mixed with various others as no longer to  
nguished. Since the waters had subsided, the  
the ford had been resumed, and the country  
had again betaken themselves to the old road,  
ng this desolate track by the shorter way, which  
them so many miles.

this moment, however, as he gazed upon the  
ed of the river, broken into deep and dangerous  
- deep and dangerous even when the river was  
west — and full of broken rocks and stones;

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which  
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and from thence, upon the long extent of brown unulating moorland, which lay at the foot of the frowning mountains beyond, nothing could be more intensely solitary than the scene. Not a single traveller could be descried upon the long line of road that lay stretched out before him — for this bank of the river was high, and commanded the other — and not a sound broke the deep silence, save the cry of a hawk which was whirling its flight above his head, and the low twitter of some reed birds near the river's brink.

He felt almost appalled by this profound silence and solitude, and uneasy thoughts began to enter his head. He kept glaring frequently at the dark, choked-up thickets upon each side of him, almost expecting some wild and ferocious face to appear among the branches.

This part of the country had not, indeed, the best of characters. What between gipsies, smugglers, and footpads, people were not very fond of traversing it after nightfall. It was, however, quite light still, being nearly an hour before sunset; so Mr. Saxston endeavoured to shake off his lugubrious feelings, and to proceed in his search.

He first carefully examined the road; nothing was to be learned from that. Then he went down to the river's brink, and peeped about among the rocks and stones, equally in vain. Then he walked some little way over the rough and difficult ground which the flood had lately covered, and from which it had retired. And at last, wearied out with the fruitless search, he returned to the place where he had left his horse.

He did not immediately mount, but kept peeping *about the thicket*, as if he expected to find something

therein. At last, he espied the little winding, intricate path, to which I have adverted before, and made his way between the branches for a few paces; but it looked so dismal, so close, so dark, so impervious, so fitted for scenes of guilt, that he did not much like to go on. He was just turning back, when, between the brambles, as if thrust in to be out of sight, he thought he saw something like the end of a bludgeon.

He felt, for the moment, almost as much startled, and almost as nervous as Robinson Crusoe, when he beheld the foot-print on the sands, and was quite as much inclined to turn his back upon the apparition, and take to his heels; but he recovered himself in a second, and well aware of the importance of getting into his possession any facts relating to this important case, he took courage, turned round, and laying his hand upon the bludgeon — for bludgeon it was — drew it forth.

He felt sick and turned pale, when he had done so. The other end of the bludgeon was steeped in blood! His first sensation was horror, the next excessive fear. A murder had been committed upon this spot! He jumped to the conclusion at once.

He began to tremble exceedingly. His craven heart was perfectly upset by the idea of being even near the scene where some bloody deed had been perpetrated, and his first impulse was to fly. He fancied the villain to whom the bludgeon belonged would start out upon him from behind the thicket, and murder him for the discovery he had made. He had heard stories, not altogether without foundation, of the vindictiveness of the gipsies who haunted these wilds; how they had been known, even years and years after the event, in

manners the most cruel and horrible, to revenge themselves upon any one who had been instrumental in detecting their crimes, and bringing them to justice.

He recollected a dreadful story of this description told to him when he was a little boy, and which had haunted his imagination for years; and he fancied himself already surrounded by grinning gipsies, putting him to death with the most horrid tortures. He was, to tell the truth, frightened out of his wits: so what did he do, but push the bludgeon into the thicket again, and so effectually conceal it that not a vestige of it was to be seen; and then, fearing to look behind him, he mounted his horse, and rode as fast as he could home.

And the faster he rode, the more frightened he felt; till he fancied he heard the hoofs of a pursuer's horse behind him. But he durst not look back: he kept urging his poor steed onwards, with whip and spur; until at last the unfortunate beast, covered with foam, and the rider quite in a cold reek with terror, they stopped before Mr. Saxston's own house, at the end of the long straggling street of the little town of Avonmore. Oh! how his heart dilated, as the hoofs of the poor animal rang upon the pavement!

He got off his horse, threw his bridle to the great lubberly boy who officiated as groom; and entering his house, crept up to his bed.

Safely there he lay, and pondered upon what he had seen; and the result of his pondering may be briefly summed up in a few words — he resolved to say nothing about it.

He began to suspect that Mr. Yates had met with *some foul play*, and had been murdered, and thrown,

with the child, into the stream; unless his body had been carried off, and hidden in some of the holes and corners with which that region of mountain limestone abounded. And then he recollected with horror, that Mr. Yates had certainly exposed himself to the vengeance of the gipsies; for he had, not very long before, succeeded in carrying out against them an indictment for horse-stealing; had proved his point; and in consequence two men had been transported as accessories; and one man, under the severity of the then law, hanged.

Mr. Saxston had been present at the trial, and he now recalled — what had not at the time made any great impression — the savage scowl of a wretched black-eyed hag, whose face had been suddenly pushed out from amid the crowd, as sentence was pronounced and then as suddenly withdrawn. He remarked the look she had cast upon Mr. Yates, as he sat in the witness box, with an air of satisfaction at this termination of the trial; and also the clenched fist, for an instant hastily raised and shook, as the eyes of the hag fell upon him.

These things, now so vividly recollected, added to his terror and consternation, and settled him in his resolution, never to breathe a word of what he had seen, or of his suspicions, to living being.

The next day, Mr. Saxston felt himself very poorly, and staid at home and dined upon broth; but a second night, passed in good sleep, served to dispel the dismal images of the previous one, and he rose up quite a changed man. All his nervous terrors dissipated like a dream; refreshed, and ready to pursue *his plans*, and pocket his five thousand pounds.

Five days and nights had now elapsed since the disappearance of the child: the body, if found, must be so swollen and disfigured with lying in the water, that in all probability it would not be recognisable. But then, how was it to be identified? By its dress, to be sure.

And he suddenly slapped his hand upon his forehead, and exclaiming: "Fool! idiot that I am! not to have thought of that before," rang the bell violently, ordered his horse out, and without waiting to swallow a morsel or breakfast, forgetful of bludgeons and of gipsies' wives, rode as hard as he could to the ford, and crossed it; rejoicing that he had as yet met nobody, for the hour was so early that not a creature was upon the road: and so he went on, and never drew bridle till he arrived at the little mountain town where Mrs. Manvers, the widow of the late incumbent, and the mother of Lady Aylmer, lived.

Time and chance happen unto all, says the wise man; and chance seems to assist the nefarious designs of the evil-doer, as well as the best-intentioned plan of the philanthropist.

Mr. Saxston had his share of good luck upon this occasion. He happened to be acquainted with the young woman who was the little Claribert's nurse, and who was rather of a superior education, and likewise remarkably pretty.

Mr. Saxston had admired her exceedingly at church, and had now and then escorted her afterwards on her way to the Castle. He had not as yet quite made up his mind whether he should so far condescend, as to offer her proposals of marriage; but the young woman, though prudent and reserved in her



behaviour, had shown such an evident partiality for his company, that he had turned the matter over in his mind several times. And now, as good luck would have it, as he rode up the lane which led to Mrs. Manvers' house, feeling extremely anxious to speak with this nurse, and yet full of the absolute necessity of not being seen by any of the other servants, and casting about in his mind how he should bring this to bear, what should he see, but the well-known, somewhat coquette, cap of Mrs. Margery, peering over a hedge of sweet-briar which bordered the lane, and separated it from Mrs. Manvers' garden.

Mrs. Manvers inhabited a small cottage, prettily ornamented, and almost buried in thick ivy, cluster roses, and eglantine. It was situated at a short distance from the neighbouring little town, and was surrounded by a small, but very pretty garden, exquisitely kept in the prime taste of that day. This, with a small annuity, was all the mother could be persuaded to accept from Lord Aylmer, when he married the beautiful daughter of a forlorn and needy widow. She had desired to remain where she had been born and where she had lived and married, in her original obscurity, surrounded, as she said, by her own people. Her greatest pleasure on earth was to receive a visit from her little grandson; who was, she declared, and with truth, one of the most beautiful and remarkable children that ever was seen.

The young Claribert was, indeed, a most lovely intelligent, and spirited child — bold, active, and independent. Digging in Mrs. Manvers' garden; riding *her great house-dog*; teasing the cat; hunting the *kittens*; rattling his carts unmercifully over her head

and screaming and laughing, in the raptures of his childish joy, till her ears tingled again. Alas! that this bright promise should have been so soon cut off! But who is equal to the understanding of these things?

Mrs. Manvers, who was now very infirm, and quite unable to travel, had been so heart-broken when the disastrous news reached her, that she had taken to her bed in all the powerless despair of a weak and aged person, totally incapable of bearing up against her sorrow. She was a good and pious creature; and she had bowed her head, and said: "It is the Lord!" but she seemed altogether too feeble in body, to bear up against the weight of this overwhelming grief. She could only patiently yield under it, and take to her bed, unable even to rise; far less to afford any assistance to her daughter.

Lady Aylmer, in truth, had so long been accustomed to pet her mother, as a being to be supported and assisted, rather than to afford support herself, that the idea of seeking aid from her in this dreadful passage of her life never suggested itself. She was almost relieved to hear that Mrs. Manvers was in her bed; but too much occupied with her own racking anxieties, and the dreadful impediment offered to free action by the seizure on her limbs, to think very much of anything but the lost child; she contented herself, with desiring Margaret to remain, and nurse Mrs. Manvers; thinking that the company of this young woman, who was rather above the common sort, might be some comfort to her mother. So Mrs. Margery was still at Woodbine Cottage, as Mrs. Manvers' *abode, was, I am sorry to say, named.*

Now, it happened that Mrs. Margery had been a good deal fatigued by the watching of the night before, Mrs. Manvers having been more than usually restless. It was a lovely autumn morning; and autumn though it was the flower-garden, with its china-asters, china roses, and various shrubs, fading into all sorts of yellows and crimsons, looked very tempting; so she had stepped out, and was strolling by the sweetbriar hedge when Mr. Saxston espied her.

Mrs. Margery heard a horse coming up the lane, and looked over the hedge and saw him; on which, the colour flew into her face, and she gave a little shriek of recognition. He took no notice, however, until he had looked up the lane and down the lane, and raised himself upon his stirrups, and peered over the neatly-cut hedge into the garden, and satisfied himself that there was nobody near, and then, he said:

"Good morning, Miss Margaret; and fortunate I think myself to find you out walking this lovely September morning, which — but you don't love flattery, and I will say no more. Is there a gate to the garden near here?"

"A few paces farther down," she answered; "but I beg you to excuse me, I dare not ask you to walk in. Mrs. Manvers is the most particular old lady in the born world."

"I was not wishing to come in, Miss Margaret, rather very particularly the contrary; but, what I wish, and what I come for, is, just three minutes *tête-à-tête* conversation with your dear self, which if *you will grant me*, we can walk down the lane together; I hanging my horse's bridle over my arm; for,

indeed, I have something of the most serious importance to impart to you."

Mrs. Margery bridled and coloured; and looked this way and that; but turned and walked on towards the gate, which she opened without making the least noise, and the two were walking in the lane together.

He chose the way by which he had come, which he knew was quite solitary; and throwing his horse's bridle over one arm, and offering her the other; which she took, whilst he gently strained the hand he held to his breast, he said:

"Miss Margaret, awful events have passed since we parted; but I hope they have not driven me out of your memory."

"Awful indeed!" she said; and she knew it was her cue to weep, so she put her handkerchief to her eye, and said: "The sweet — sweet babe!"

"Yes, poor little creature! there is an end of him and of poor Mr. Yates — both drowned; swept away into the Bristol Channel, and not the slightest trace of either of them to be discovered anywhere."

"So I heard. I assure you, Mr. Saxston, I have cried about it till my head was ready to split at times; and as for his poor grandmama, I think it will be the death of her, for she has never held up her head since."

"It is a very awful business. But now, Miss Margaret, I have something very particular to impart to you, relating to this matter. The body of neither Yates nor the poor little fellow have yet been found;

*Castle Avon. I.*

but I know one who would give five thousand pounds if he could produce evidence of the child's decease, or find the body. Now, I hope the body may be found, for, the next heir being a very great friend of mine, would prove a very powerful one in due course, if he succeeded to the inheritance, I doubt not; he it is will give five thousand pounds to the fortunate person, who might succeed in discovering the poor boy's remains. It is so long, however, since — the time of his disappearance being now nearly a week — that the poor little corpse might be too much changed to be easily identified. Pray, how was he dressed when he left you?"

"Oh, poor little thing! I put him on his warmest clothes; for I said to myself, surely it's going to be a wet night, the clouds were drawing up so. You never saw the like. I would not have had him go, poor lamb! but Mr. Yates told me my poor lord was a dying, and must see the child; and my lady would have it — so what could I do? and the dear boy himself, as soon as he heard his papa was ill, and wanted to see him, would take no refusal, but was in such a hurry to be off! I think I see him now, with his beautiful flaxen curls hanging over his sweet lily-white neck and shoulders, and his large blue eyes fixed upon his grandmama, begging to go, almost crying to do so. He was such a sensible, loving creature; I think there never was so forward and clever, or so sweet and affectionate a child of his age before."

*And here Mrs. Margery really did feel some honest, unaffected tears swelling to her eyes.*

"Well — well," said Mr. Saxston, rather impatiently; "and so what had he on?"

"Why, he had on his little every-day dress of tartan; and I was for changing it, knowing as how my lady loved to see him dressed out, especially when he was to go to his papa; and I said to Mrs. Manvers —"

"Pray tell me at once, what the child wore when he went away."

Mrs. Margery looked up with an expression of mingled wonder and displeasure at this abruptness, and seemed very much inclined to be offended; which Mr. Saxston observing, he assumed the humblest air of contrition, and added:

"If you knew how very pressing this business is — how short my time, and the importance of any information you could give, not only to my own interests as regards money, but to interests far nearer to my heart; you would forgive my ill-breeding, indeed you would. May I beg Miss Margaret to tell me what the child wore, as succinctly as she can?"

There was something in Mr. Saxston's manner, that more than ever convinced Miss Margaret, that she had an interest in the number of thousands of pounds, that Mr. Saxston might possess; so checking her natural inclination to prate, she answered, for once, to the point.

"He had on his tartan frock, and over that a warm pelisse-coat of blue cloth, embroidered with braid, of my lady's own working; and a felt hat, with a grey feather and blue ribbons."

"And his gloves?"

"Yes, a pair of odd, old-fashioned gloves, worked

in blue, of my lady's own work, which he was so proud and fond of, that he insisted upon having them on, whenever he was dressed to go out."

Mr. Saxston having moved on a little, said:

"Did Mrs. Manvers, or any of the servants, see how he was dressed when he went away?"

"Well, I don't much think they did. For Mrs. Manvers had kissed and taken leave of him before he had his coat and hat on; and then Mr. Yates was in such a hurry to be gone, that I scuttled him downstairs, and popped him on the horse myself. No, I don't think, as it happened, that any of the servants saw him after he was dressed. Mrs. Manvers keeps only two maids, you know."

"You don't happen to have any more clothes of the same sort, belonging to the young gentleman, by you?"

"No, I have only his best black velvet coatee and his white frocks. Plenty of them, for his mamma and Mrs. Manvers, all summer-time could bear him in nothing but his white frocks; and for sure, he looked, for all the world, like a little angel in them."

"Humph! haven't got another pelisse or great coat?"

"No; oh yes! there is his common blue garden coat, what they were used to put him on, when the weather was cold. I had it with me; but as he had never worn it since we came, I forgot that, or it would have been the fitterer for such a journey with that Mr. Yates."

Again Mr. Saxston bent down his head, as if in *deep thought*; yet, meditative as he seemed, he did *not the less* keep advancing down the lane, and draw-

ing his companion with him. The lane led to some rough, solitary fields, and the banks and hedges upon either side were so high, that it was completely screened from observation.

When they had arrived at a most secluded spot, where the narrow lane passed between two almost precipitous banks, covered with brushwood, and nearly hidden from the sky by the bushes which shot athwart it, Mr. Saxston stopped suddenly; and turning to his companion, said:

"Time is precious; and delay may be fatal to everything. Answer me a plain question. Will you assist me to gain five thousand pounds, on condition that I make you Mrs. Saxston?"

"Oh la! —" she was beginning to colour, bridle, and make a fuss,

"Silence!" he said, with as much stern authority as if he had been her husband for ten years; "listen to my conditions. You must fetch me what I want, in the first place; afterwards you must consent to go with me where I will take you, and where we will be married. But you must consent to live at that place, till I think it wise to bring you to my home. Many foolish young folks have made secret marriages before now to the *ruin* of their prospects. Will you consent to such for the *making* of yours and mine?"

"La, dear! only think —"

"Only think of one thing, Margaret. Will you, or will you not?"

He had a weak, tiresome, silly woman to deal with. It was some time before he could bring her to reason; but the object before him was too great, and *he of too determined a character, to suffer himself to*



be baffled even by the silliest of silly women — tures of all created beings the most tiresome intractable to deal with.

Partly by blandishments, and partly by scolding, he at last brought the nurse-maid to the point he wanted. She promised to return to the house with out a complete suit of the child's linen, a white and the blue coat she had spoken of, and accompany Mr. Saxston wherever he would; which purpose he easily accomplished without being observed; for Mrs. Manvers was accustomed to lie till about ten o'clock undisturbed, and then to have her breakfast. As two maids were busy at their various occupations, it was not till ten o'clock, therefore, that Mrs. Manvers was missed.

She was then not to be found. Neither in the room nor in the garden was she, nor in the lane in which the cook ran, thinking that she might, as she sometimes did, have lounged out of the way.

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## CHAPTER VIII.

IN what a state had the poor mother passed this time! Of all agonies, the horror of heart-suspense is perhaps the most hard to bear; and what a suspense was hers!

It was not the alternative between death on the one hand, and security on the other, like the harassing uncertainty of those who wait in terror for tidings of a ship which has not arrived at the time expected. One comfort, at least, the poor beating heart cannot be deprived of in that case — either the loved one is safe, or he is dead. Either way the hope is complete, or the extent of the misery is known. Oh! woe indeed, when to be assured of the death of a beloved one, would almost be a relief.

At first Lady Aylmer had not felt the anguish of his view of the subject. She believed that her child lived, and believing so, that he would certainly be recovered; but, as she lay imprisoned upon that bed of pain, to which the contractions of her limbs condemned her, more fearful visions took possession of her mind. She still felt the most undoubted conviction that the child had not perished in the water.

But what then had become of him? Had he wandered away, poor little thing, and died miserably of cold and starvation in the bushes? Or, had he — she had heard of such things, all sorts of tales about gipsies were current in that part of the

country — had he been stolen away by some of those vagrant tribes, with which common report, peopled the solitudes of moors and mountains; and in that case, what would be his fate? She fancied the loving, clever child, almost preternaturally forward in intellect and affections, vainly calling to his father and his mother with those piercing shrieks of woe, which she had heard him once or twice utter, when they two had been parted. His distress, the day she was forced to separate from him, and leave him with Mrs. Manvers still haunted her.

What must the poor little creature's agonies be now? And yet the hope that he lived was still sweet. She thought of the large reward she had offered, and felt it to be impossible that she should not recover him.

In such alternations, and racked by impatience to be well, to be able at this eventful period of her life to leave her bed, and see and act for herself in so dreadful an emergency, the heavy hours passed away. She had not yet seen Mr. Gorhambury. She felt an invincible repugnance to meeting a man always disliked by her husband, and by her husband's father, and who had, as she thought, thrust himself in a very indelicate manner upon her hospitality, at a moment when it was so evident she must wish to be alone. She was almost reconciled to her illness, when she recollected that it spared her from the necessity of enduring a presence, at that time so more than ever odious.

As for her grief at the loss of her husband, that, in the distraction of her mind, might be called almost a sweet feeling, when compared with others. So as-

ed and torn as she was by terror and anxiety, it was almost consoling to reflect that he had escaped; that he slept quietly where neither pain nor sorrow could reach him more; nay, better far perhaps, was he now rejoicing in those regions of celestial joy for which his spirit was fitted, watching over, and shedding a softening balm upon the lacerations of her heart, by influences vague, yet most benign.

She had insisted upon being carried into his room, to take a last farewell of all that remained of him on earth; had kissed the marble cheek with many tears, tears which poured so fast and warm, they seemed to comfort her desolated heart. And then she had retired to her bed, to struggle with her anxiety, and endeavour to calm and compose her spirits, by resignation to the Divine will, even in this agonizing hour.

So the days passed on till the funeral of Lord Mermer took place; after which, she concluded that of course Mr. Gorhambury would leave the Castle, she was resolved to send him no invitation to remain.

She was a creature of instincts and impulses — more, perhaps, than she ought to have been, poor girl! — and her antipathy to Mr. Gorhambury was so great, that she felt that it would be quite a relief now that he was gone away again.

What was her surprise then, the morning after the funeral, not only to learn that Mr. Gorhambury still remained at the Castle, but to discover, that he was assuming an authority over its inmates, which could not be justified by his possessing the rights of owner? She was startled at the intelligence; but when the first surprise was over, she began to reflect, and

things presented themselves to her mind very agreeably.

Could it be possible, that he was intending claim the inheritance, before the death of her son was ascertained? To her, who felt so certain that child had not perished, this appeared an act of most unheard-of greediness and injustice.

But what should she be able to do? Supposing did put in his claim, what would the law decide? Yet so, early! Before even all possible means had been exhausted to search out the boy!

Oh! she felt that she must lie in bed no longer. she died for it, she must be up and doing.

"I must get up, Mary; indeed, I must," she said to her maid. "Get me up and dress me. If I cannot stand, I will be supported; if I cannot walk, I will be lifted. I must lie in my bed no longer. Get me up; dress me any how. I must see and speak to Mr. Gorhambury."

"What dress? Ah, my lady!"

"What dress? My mourning weeds, to be sure. You do not think I am afraid of my black suit. (Mary! Mary! when the heart is in thickest night, it matters it what we wear!")

They got her up, but under agonies of pain so great, that she could scarcely forbear from shrieking when she moved a limb; yet she was resolute. They got her to the sofa in her sleeping-room, and then she sent to request an interview with Mr. Gorhambury.

She was kept waiting a little time before he appeared.

*Beautiful, pale creature! there she lay, entire*

with black, her lovely form hidden in a sort of crape and sables; her face only visible in of white, and her hands like statuary marble, d before her.

tiful and strange she looked! for her lips were s colourless and deathlike as her cheeks; and , large eyes, still ardent and brilliant, seemed evidence of the life within her! So she ap- those large eyes fixed impatiently upon the : it at last slowly and solemnly opened, and l the tall, spectral figure of Mr. Gorhambury, like herself, in deepest mourning, and with w cheek almost as pale as her own. He was s I think I have said, of ill-built frame, large oints, and ungraceful, uncomely appearance; from the harshness of its outline, the size of res, and the hard coldness of his eye, singu- pleasing.

people he in some degree terrified as well as d; but Lady Aylmer was not one to be terri- those she did not love. She had no fear of of man, except when that of the one she is clouded with displeasure. *That* she feared words. She was very, very ill; faint and sick at nd feeble and in pain; but her high spirit de- er not — it was aroused to its full powers by eated the interests of her son.

od morning Mr. Gorhambury," she said, with of stately courtesy, as he entered the room, ted, and turned still paler, as he beheld the but beautiful figure of Lady Aylmer. "I beg your pardon that I have played the part s *so ill*; but my sickness and my great sorrow

will plead my excuse. I should have been very sorry — deeply grieved — very much —”

“I beg Lady Aylmer will make no apologies for me,” he said, in a confused, hesitating tone, a thing new in him; but her great beauty, together with her knowledge of the wrong that he had done her, recalled him. She was surprised at this appearance of timidity and irresolution in his manner. She had been accustomed to think of him as of a man little given to that sort of infirmity; and the observation of it in so great a degree softened her feelings; so, abating a little of her lofty coldness of her manner, she went on:

“I ought, I know, to express my obligations to Mr. Gorhambury for so speedily visiting the Castle his kinsman at such a mournful time as this. It was no doubt, kindly intended, to honour by his presence the funeral of one whom all men revered and esteemed. I thank him for it; and I would, at another time, beg of him to postpone his departure, and give me the honour of his company for a few days; but — but — he must excuse me; I cannot — no more.”

Mr. Gorhambury seemed not to know exactly what to answer to make to this speech; yet it could not pass unanswered. It brought the matter at once to a point between them, courteous as were the phrases in which its meaning might be couched. She had intended so. She was too sore, too harassed, too excited, to brook delay. She felt that she must at once be satisfied, as to his intentions and his claims.

“I am sorry; at another time, I hope, my hospitality —”

“*Madam!*”

The answer, brief as it was, aided by the tone and look which accompanied it, at once conveyed what it was intended to convey. She answered his look with one as expressive.

"I consider myself, as guardian of my son, to be the mistress of this house during his minority," she said, haughtily, raising herself up from her pillow as she spoke, supporting herself upon one arm, and turning that pale face and those lustrous eyes towards him.

"Guardian of your son!"

This look was intended now to express astonishment at her audacity, mingled with pity.

"My son is alive, Sir!"

He shook his head.

"He is alive, Sir! I am certain of it."

A half-contemptuous smile was suffered to steal to his lips, as he answered:

"Our wishes are evidence to no one but ourselves."

"I know it, Sir. Neither will wishes, on the other hand, prove that of which there is no evidence. Produce your proofs. I know my son came to land. There is his glove!" she cried, plucking the little relic from her bosom, and holding it up in a sort of wild triumph; "his glove! dropped from his little, precious, hand; and the glove was *dry*. It had been dropped *after* the child landed. He *did* land — he lives! he is safe! But, oh, my darling! my darling! where are you?"

"And upon such evidence," said Gorhambury, coldly, "is a man to be kept for years — for your life — for his own — may be, for ever — from his *just inheritance*? *Futile attempt!*"



"We shall see that," she said, her eyes sparkling with animation. "In the meantime, as that guardian, and entitled by my husband's will, *whom I have seen*, to exercise the right, I take leave to consider myself as mistress of this Castle, to bid forbid here as I think proper; and it pains me to begin by a gross breach of hospitality. But under the circumstances, I will defer the pleasure of receiving Mr. Gorhambury till a more expedient time."

"And I, Madam, take leave, under the circumstances, to say, that it is Mr. Gorhambury's intention to remain in this Castle, as its rightful owner, until the child of Lord Aylmer can be produced to negate his claim."

"Oh, he will be produced! he will be produced! Don't fear but he will be produced. I have given my sofa — I shall soon be on my horse; and England and Wales, and the whole empire, ay, and the world shall be searched, and I shall find my child. I am sure of that, Sir! In the meantime, under Lord Aylmer's will, of which I know, in his great generous confidence, he constituted me sole executrix I shall at least exercise the rights of an executrix of his property, and —"

"No will, can give any one a claim to interfere between me and the property entailed upon me as the next heir in blood."

"No doubt, if you were the heir; but we shall see that. In the meantime," and she laid her hand on the bell.

A footman appeared.

"Send Willmore to me."

The old man came in.

"Willmore, there lies a thickly-folded paper — your late honoured master's will, in short — upon the table which stood by his bedside. Bring it to me. It is sealed up in an envelope of white foolscap paper, and endorsed upon the back. I want it."

Mr. Gorhambury now rose from the chair he had taken near the sofa; and going to the other end of the room applied himself, whilst apparently waiting for the appearance of the papers, to the examination of a basket of greenhouse plants, which stood near one of the windows. After that, he approached a table at some distance, and began to look over some books of prints, that lay there. The time seemed very long; the lady became impatient. She rang the bell rather sharply. Her maid appeared.

"What can Willmore be about? Tell him to come to me."

"What can you have been about, Willmore?" as the old man entered the room. "It lies upon the little inlaid table which stood by the bedside."

"Madam, the table has been removed; and I can find no such paper as you describe, anywhere."

"Who removed the table?" starting up, as if to go and search for the will herself. "Alas!" she screamed, and fell back again.

Oh! nightmare dream! Worse! horrid, horrid fetters of the body!

"Who moved the table? Who dared to move the table?"

Her hand was on the bell again, and it was pulled violently. Mary again appeared.

"Send Mrs. Hislop" (the housekeeper).

"Oh, Mrs. Hislop! Mrs. Hislop! who was it went and — and — arranged your dear master's room? There was a table by the bedside; and upon it was laid the will. Oh me! that I never thought of it before! How careless! And Willmore cannot find the will. The housemaid must have mislaid it. For Heaven's sake! dear woman, go and inquire, make it out, find it, and bring it to me."

"Oh, my God! my God!" she cried, passionately, "what will become of me? Who will be guardian to my son? That man — that man? Oh, pity! pity! pity! — never!"

Mr. Gorhambury, upon hearing this last burst of vehement feeling, found it impossible any longer to preserve his attitude of affected indifference. It was necessary to come forwards, to say something, to do something. To preserve the appearance of indifference which he at first had assumed, would be almost as suspicious as anything he could do.

He had been making great efforts with himself to command his nerves, whilst he had pretended to be occupied with the plants, and to still the tumultuous beating of his heart, and keep, if possible, the blood from rushing to his cheeks and temples. He had succeeded but ill; and there was a deep-red suffusion over his face, like the sullen glow of a stormy sky seen under a heavy cloud, as he turned and approached the sofa where Lady Aylmer lay.

She could not conceal her dislike and fear at that moment. She gazed upon him with eyes but too expressive of both. He felt nearly all that her looks conveyed; and feelings of rage and revenge were rising *bitterly in his heart*, as he looked at her, mingled with

a bad exultation at the certainty that she was in his power.

He seemed to lose that sense of his shameful crime, which had so oppressed him a few moments before, in the resentment which her distrust and dislike engendered. He was able, therefore, to speak with less agitation than he had thought possible, as, with an appearance of suppressed indignation, partly real and partly affected, he said:

"I am at a loss to conceive, what I may have done to merit Lady Aylmer's aversion and distrust to the degree she is pleased to express."

"Done! Oh, no! — it is not you; I beg your pardon. What did I say? My child! my poor, poor child!"

And she burst into tears, and lay weeping unrestrainedly for some time. It was the first regular fit of weeping in which she had indulged since the death of her husband and the loss of her boy, and she did not endeavour to restrain it, but lay there, yielding to her sorrow, to the desolation of her love, and to the idea, ever present, of her child not drowned, but living — the victim of oppression and wrong; for, whether rightly or not, she considered the claim of Mr. Gorhambury as a usurpation of her son's inheritance; and, whether rightly or not, felt an instinctive certainty that there would be little scruple, as to the means used to secure it.

Her suspicions were so strong, her distrust of his honour and good faith so unaccountable, her terrors so almost wild, that she began to tremble for her own reason. Little aware was she how nearly her suspicions *approached the truth*, when they extended to a doubt

whether Mr. Gorhambury, some way or other, were not concerned in the disappearance of the will. But he allowed her to shed a torrent of tears, whose abundance, as they always do upon a nervous temperament like hers, softened and refreshed her, and quieting the terrible excitement of her mind, she felt in a great measure restored to herself — to that self so full of clear perception, just reasoning, and generous courage.

As her spirits became tranquillised, her sense of the situation in which she stood was sharpened, and the necessity for calmness and self-possession seemed more imperative than ever. So she conquered her hysterical emotion, and raising her head from the pillow, looked steadily into Mr. Gorhambury's face, as if she would have read his soul. He had continued standing there before her, as if fascinated to the spot watching her as she wept. When thus she fixed her eyes upon him, he felt his colour change.

"The will, I begin to fear, will not be found," she said at last, as steadily as she could. "Can you tell me what will be my position, should this prove to be the case?"

"Your position shall be, as nearly as possible," he answered with emphasis, and as if relieved, for he felt very much relieved by the question — "as nearly as possible, that which it would have been had the will been found; at least, so far as it shall be in my power to make it so."

"My position — my own pecuniary position, perhaps, you mean. I thank you, Sir, for your kind intentions," she went on, with rather a haughty bend of the head, "but I was not adverting to that. I was

thinking of my position as regarded my child. By that will, Mr. Gorhambury, I was constituted his guardian."

"Why *will* you, Lady Aylmer, afflict yourself and me with suppositions so — allow me to say it — so irrational? Why will you persist in indulging hopes, equally injurious to my just claims, and your own restoration to tranquillity? What has been — has been — the past cannot be restored, nor the dead recalled to life, struggle and resist as we may. Why will Lady Aylmer so obstinately refuse to acquiesce in the truth?"

"Only, let Lady Aylmer be assured that such *is* the truth, and she will find submission and acquiescence, doubt it not, Sir," she said boldly; "but *that* is precisely what I must be assured of. I repeat it, I do not believe the child has perished."

"What would convince you of it?"

"When I see my baby: then I will believe it, and not till then," she said, and her voice faltered. "Alive or dead, let me see him again, and then, and not till then, I shall be satisfied. And then, and not till then," she went on with increasing energy, "shall I be convinced that you have a title to my boy's inheritance; and we must try, Sir, if necessary, whether the law be of the same opinion or not."

"No doubt," he said, "the law will be satisfied."

He appeared, as she thought, very well contented with this reference. She asked, hastily:

"Have you any evidence which has not reached me?"

"Not as yet," he replied; but added, "that the *time was short*, and the body might yet be found."

"And, identified?"

"And, identified."

And so saying he went away, with the words: "I will see Lady Aylmer again when there is anything new to communicate."

Three days after this Mr. Gorhambury asked to see Lady Aylmer again.

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His stern and dark countenance was more than usually dark and lowering, when Mr. Gorhambury appeared once more in Lady Aylmer's dressing-room. She was still lying upon the sofa, a helpless cripple, but gradually recovering the use of her limbs, and as it was hoped, her health. He sent up to request an interview, saying that he had matter of importance to communicate. An involuntary shudder passed over her as she received the message. There was but one matter of importance which could bring him into her presence again so soon. Her heart began to beat violently. She pressed her hands tightly over it, and sat half-raised, looking anxiously at the door. It opened, and the tall man, with his strangely hard but now fearful countenance, appeared. He held a small parcel of folded writing paper in his hand.

"You are come again," was all she could utter for she was almost breathless.

He made no answer, but walking up to the sofa put the folded paper into her hand. She opened it and shrieked aloud:

"He has been found!"

And the paper and a lock of flaxen hair fell from her hand to the floor.

"Yes," said Mr. Gorhambury, gravely, "the body has been found."

"Oh, where? how? when? my boy! my little boy! oh, my child! my child! let me see him. You are restored, then, my baby! but how! — let me see him! let me kiss his little cheek once more, fold his pretty hand in mine! Oh, Sir! have me carried where he is; let me see him at least! my boy! my darling boy!"

It seemed as if the certainty that she should see him again, even though dead, softened the anguish of this extinction of her hopes. To have one thus lost, again, even in any way restored, was a consolation.

"Let me see him. Where is he? where is he?"

"My dear Lady Aylmer," began Mr. Gorhambury in a faltering voice, for his heart — even *his* heart — was touched, and his bosom was heaving with unusual emotion. "Pray, do not run on in this way. Recollect, my dear lady, that it is now nearly a fortnight since the poor little boy was lost. Indeed, you must not ask to see him. I brought you this hair, and his clothes, though much discoloured by the water; it may perhaps be a poor consolation to you, to see them. I hope you will not ask for more."

"But I do, and I shall —" she said, again the prey to vague, unaccountable suspicions.

"If you insist — certainly. But I warn you that there will be no satisfaction in the sight; the water, the exposure to the elements, corruption, has done its work. But for its dress, the body could not have been identified. But, upon this subject, I have taken *all the precaution* you or any one could desire. The



clothes were taken off, before proper witnesses — namely, the clergyman of the parish, Mr. Saxston, your old servant Willmore, and your housekeeper. Still, I would wish you to have every assurance; but I believe when you have talked with these people, you *will* be satisfied."

All this was said with considerable effort, and as if he were forcing himself to speak. She mused a little, and then she said:

"Pray send Mrs. Hislop to me. Tell her to bring the clothes."

"Certainly I will, and I hope —" and he left the room, muttering something about satisfaction, which was not very intelligible.

In a short time Mrs. Hislop appeared. The good woman's eyes were red with weeping, and it was as much as she could do to help bursting out crying again, when she saw her lady. She entered, carrying a little frock and coat and child's linen in her hand; they were quite discoloured with the wet and the sun. The good woman kept looking at them and weeping, whilst she gave them to Lady Aylmer. The mother seized upon the relics with a sort of hungry impatience. Hastily she looked them over. Alas! she knew them but too well. The little muslin frock all decked with lace and embroidery by her own hand; the tiny shirt, the stays, and petticoat, too well remembered; above all, the blue pelisse, in which he had so often played about. She kept looking them over and over: sometimes she kissed them; sometimes she pressed them to her heart and to her eyes.

"*And you saw them taken off!*" at last she said. "*Ah, Hislop! my poor child. Where is he now?*"

"We have clothed him in one of his own long night-gowns. He had been already placed in a shell when he came here, poor little love! But Mr. Saxston would not suffer him to be touched, or anything more done, till he was brought here, poor thing! Mr. Gorhambury insisted upon Mr. Peters and Mr. Saxston being present whilst I took the things off. I did it, my lady, with my own hands. But, oh dear me! so changed! I would not — I could not have you see him, my dear lady, for all the world."

"I wish to see him, and I must see him. I cannot rest without I do. I must kiss his little hand, his little cheek. Ah, Hislop! Hislop!"

"His hand! his cheeks! No, my dear lady," said the good housekeeper, gravely. "You must kiss them again in heaven; they are dust and ashes now."

"What do you mean?"

"Why, my lady, to tell you the truth at once, the identity being ascertained, without a doubt, by the clothes, and proper attestations having been made, Mr. Gorhambury, seeing the sad state of the poor little remains, thought it best that the coffin should be closed. It has been soldered up. Indeed, indeed, my lady, believe me, he did right — we did right; it was necessary."

"You did greatly — greatly wrong. How come I to be the last to be informed that my child was found? How come you, my servants — Mr. Peters — to lend yourselves to conduct like this? Not even the choice offered me — not even the opportunity of satisfying myself —"

"Dear, my lady! this happened in the night, or *very early this morning*, that you were asleep; and all

the gentlemen, and Mr. Peters more particularly, agreed that you had better not be disturbed."

"Fools!" was the indignant exclamation. "Pick me up that lock of hair, which has fallen down. Is this a lock of my child's hair?" she said, looking at it with suspicion. "My child's hair was more golden than this."

"Dear, my lady! you forget how long it has lain drenched in the water."

"This is not like thy hair, my child!" she kept repeating. "The garments are thine, and I can press them to my heart. This hair is a stranger to it. I *will* see the body!"

"Dear, dear, my lady! don't, don't think of it. Mr. Peters, all of them say —"

"Silence, Hislop! I *will* see the body!"

It was in vain to remonstrate. She was determined; and there was no one who, in this respect, could pretend to have the right to control her.

In vain Mr. Gorhambury, Mr. Peters, her servants, pleaded and assured her of the uselessness of the proceeding, of the sad changes which had taken place having rendered it impossible to recognise the child, except by the clothes and the hair. But she was obstinate, and they were forced to yield.

With infinite vexation, Mr. Gorhambury saw that covering removed, which he had hoped had sealed the transaction in silence for ever. He stood at the door of Lady Aylmer's room, listening in breathless anxiety to what would come next.

*The door was left open, as the servants carried the mournful little coffin in; and what was his start*

ror at the first exclamation of Lady Aylmer, is not the body of my child!"

a corpse was, however, so completely changed, lled by the water, and defaced by the influences and air, that no one could wonder that she did recognise it. The servants stood by gazing and ig compassionate tears, but the mother's eyes ry.

his is not my child!" she kept repeating. Mr. nbury could bear it no longer; he came into om.

hat can you intend," he said harshly, "by the on of this wild assertion? Only one thing, it , to keep me out of — and yourself in — pos- of the late Lord Aylmer's entailed property, ine. What am I to understand by this obsti- nd — I would not be severe — *interested* in- ty?"

ive it what name you please, Sir — obstinate rested, it is indifferent to me. This is not the f my child."

ear, my lady, you are raving, and — The , and the hair!" put in Hislop, sadly. . he hair is not his hair; but the clothes are his . And you all say this poor drowned child was l in them. And you, Hislop, say you took them id you, Willmore, and Mr. Peters, saw them off; but, I repeat it, this is not the body of my

Take the poor thing away, and bury it where ill; by my dear Lord Aylmer, no doubt; but that his child."

attendants looked at each other significantly.

"Poor thing! poor thing!" muttered Mr. Gorham-bury.

"Do not speak so of me. Do not look significantly at me. Do not, Sir, pretend to suspect that my wits are failing me; you *know* they are not," she said, almost fiercely. "Take the inheritance if you will: the law, I suppose, will give it you now; but," looking steadily in his face, "you know best, whether you are not despoiling the widow and the orphan."

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## CHAPTER IX.

It was, in truth, a case that would not admit of a final question. The best professional advice upon the subject was taken by Lady Aylmer, but the matter would not admit of a doubt. The opinions were unanimous, and indeed were delivered in a manner which gave Lady Aylmer the very painful impression that her perseverance was attributed either to very selfish and improper motives, or to a mind unsettled by misfortune. The matter was therefore dropped. Lady Aylmer took her departure from the Castle, and transferred possession to Mr. Gorhambury. She retired on the slender provision of three hundred a-year, which was all she took by her settlement; the settlement having, in truth, been intended by the old lord rather to bar her dower, than for any other purpose. Mr. Gorhambury used every persuasion in vain to induce her to accept an annuity from his hands. The intent of this annuity had, indeed, as he reflected on the subject (the first desire, to justify himself to his own conscience, subsiding gradually,) fallen to one short of the provisions of the will. Still, he would have been willing to make a handsome and sufficient provision for the widow of Lord Aylmer, at least according to his ideas of what that position demanded. It would have been a source of considerable satisfaction to him if this had been accepted; for though the usual arguments were urged, with which the

arch advocate of evil, may be almost heard to his cause in the secret chambers of the heart, he not succeed in altogether quieting the voice within. He said to himself that he, as heir, had an undoubted right to the property. Perhaps the way in which the death of the child had been proved, though such a necessity of the case required, might not be altogether irreproachable; yet the fact of the death being questionable, what mattered a few idle scruples as to the means of proving it? True, he had destroyed the will; but this was only done to take from a woman half mad with pride and disappointment, the power of dissipating a fine property among lawyers. Though to the provision offered, it was as large as in the case of Lord Aylmer ought to have given to a woman, who came portionless into the *family*; but be it as small or great, it mattered not, for he was persuaded she would be too wilful to accept it.

And in this last supposition, as we have seen, she proved to be right. Lady Aylmer, though constrained as it were to silence by the universal conviction around, still maintained her suspicions. But she had no more, feeling that her own powers of action, when the time for action ever arrive, would be only weakened by the charge to which further opposition exposed her, namely, that of being interested, or of a mind dishonest, and thus the persuasions of others would be strengthened by her perseverance in contradicting them. Receive anything from Mr. Gorhambury, however, that she would not.

"*He* knows," she said, "that my own convictions are unchanged, that I still believe the body before me forward was not that of my child. How it

come to pass, I can form no idea, I do not pretend to account for it; but what I repeat is, that he knows that I do not believe that the body he and his produced, was that of my child. I still feel persuaded the boy lives, and will one day claim his own. When that day arrives, he shall not find his mother receiving a stipend from the hand that wronged him."

"Wronged him!" exclaimed the by-standers, in a tone that expressed disapprobation.

"Wronged him!" she repeated. "And I will accept nothing — no, not one penny from Mr. Gorhambury."

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To this resolution Lady Aylmer adhered. She retired from the Castle, and her health requiring almost daily assistance from a more skilful medical man, than was likely to be found in the remote place where her mother lived, decided upon taking a small house in the neighbourhood of the city of G—, that cathedral town where Mr. Gorhambury had lived, and where his friend the Dean still lived, and where Mr. Gorhambury's curate, Mr. Lovel, lived.

The mother of Lady Aylmer, indeed, survived the shock of these events but a very short time. A paralytic stroke deprived her of speech, and soon afterwards she died. Amid the hurry of events, anything that might have been remarked as peculiar in the conduct of the little boy's maid escaped observation. The state of Lady Aylmer's health rendered it impossible for her to be carried the distance, and over the roads, which led to her mother's house: but the city of G— *not being far off*, and the roads good — she



was moved there. The aged mother, therefore, died without seeing her daughter again, and thus all clue to the transaction was lost.

Mr. Gorhambury, who suffered for some months the most harassing anxiety from the idea of detection, found his mind considerably relieved by this turn of affairs; and he settled himself down with his wife and his son, to the enjoyment of the princely fortune he had obtained. Such enjoyment at least as ill-gotten wealth bestows!

He found possession, as many, with far less reason, who have only too greedily desired, without using guilty means to obtain, have, from experience, found it. He found possession, an apple of Sodom — all dust and ashes within. He became a very gloomy, dissatisfied, restless-tempered man, far more austere and reserved in his deportment than ever; and accordingly more than ever disliked by all who knew him. For one thing in particular he was especially censured — he never, from the time he came to his fortune, could be prevailed upon, be the occasion what it might, professionally to take part in the services of his Church. Perhaps this, to those who know him as we do, will appear the only sign of grace about him.

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It was a sweet, soft summer evening, when Lady Aylmer was lifted from the carriage-bed in which she *had* travelled, and was laid upon a couch in the small *dining-room* of the diminutive, but pretty cottage, *which* was henceforward to be her home.

Alone, without a friendly voice to cheer her, in the drear solitude of a childless widow; her body crippled, every motion a pain, the light of her eyes extinguished, and the hope which sustained her, so far as this world was concerned, become almost as a delirious dream!

But she had a constant heart, a firm temper, a faithful reliance upon God. The convictions of her relation to One Great Mind, One Alldiffusing Head, with whom her moral being was linked by ties indestructible; in whose hands she was, whose providence was over her, as over all, and in whose government there was neither overlooking nor forgetting, nor indifference, nor neglect, for any the smallest living being; her conviction of the reality of these things was deep and sincere. Lady Aylmer was possessed of that blessing of all blessings — a true, strong, lively faith; and let people consider such faith as well or ill-founded — “bottled smoke,” if they please, in their arrogant assumption of superior wisdom, so to style it — but let them try to find a substitute; let them find for us a strength in weakness, a companion in solitude, a solace in suffering, like this — namely, the sure trust in exercises of faith, in devotion to duty, to submission and resignation; not to a blind necessity, but to a Father — to an all-wise and merciful God!

This poor, suffering, weak and forsaken woman proved the truth of these things, as thousands and thousands weak, suffering, and forsaken of all the world, like her, have proved, and, please God, will continue to prove them, in spite of the scoffs and *scorns of vain Socialists*, who ought to know better,

who *do* know better, if the pride and haughtiness of their heart would but let them confess it.

This poor, weak, excitable, suffering, desolate woman laid her head down upon her pillow in that little cottage of hers; and she had the strength given her to utter:

“The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord.”

And will you presume to say she was not the better for it — with your “bottled smoke?”

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Mr. Lovel, the curate, was the first person who came to call upon Lady Aylmer. The morning after he heard of her arrival, he said to his little daughter, Hernana:

“Child, get thyself ready, and put on thy best becomes; for thou must go with me and make a visit.”

“Oh! I am so glad. And who are we going to see, papa? Shall I put on my best bonnet?”

“I told thee — did I not? — to put on thy best becomes; for we are to visit a lady, who was once among the grandest in the land, but is now desolate as the widow of Tekoah; and therefore, my little girl, as far as dress, can do her honour, do her honour; and as far as kindness can give her comfort, give her comfort; and I look to you, my little woman, to try to do that; for I think thou wouldst comfort Despair *himself*, if thou didst meet him.”

“Dress, papa,” said Hernana, glancing at her

father's hat, which he had taken off, and in his usual careless way had put down upon the chair next him, "dress, dear papa, proves respect; and one ought to be neat, because the lady was rich, and is now poor —"

Hernana mused a little; till she had settled the propriety, and the kindness, and the delicacy of all this in her heart; and then, taking up her father's hat, and putting it on her hand, as on a pole, she turned it round and round, with an expression half-charmed, half-diverted, and added:

"And this old hat!"

"Never mind my old hat. I am an old fellow, and become an old hat."

"But you are not an old fellow at all, papa," she said, with a look of admiration, as she turned to him. "You are quite young, and one of the most beautiful men that ever was seen; and you don't suit at all with this old hat."

"Well, if I don't, something else does, you little flatterer," said he, pleased in spite of himself with his darling child's simple admiration.

"Something else? Oh, frugality! and suppose — s'pose — s'pose! Why, I really believe, papa, so you could feed the hungry, and clothe the naked, you would not care if you went without any rim to your hat at all."

"Not very much, perhaps," said he, laughing; "but I should have the sun in my eyes. However, never mind my hat; hats are costly things, and I have no money to spare; but out of respect to this poor lady Aylmer, brush it up, and make it as spruce  
*Castle Avon. I.*

as you can, my darling." And he went to his study.

Hernana stood there and mused, as she turned round the hat, with its white, worn line round the crown, and its napless, bare rim, and its shabby, crushed appearance. And she thought upon the anchorite, upon the self-denying, the ascetic, yet the generous, gladsome, sweet character of her father, till she almost thought a hat like that of other men would misbecome him; that his eye, so penetrating and clear, his fine intellectual brow, his smile of unparalleled beauty and sweetness, would look less peculiarly his own, if he wore a hat and coat like common gentlemen: like the Dean, for instance, or like Mr. Gorhambury, or like Mr. This or That. And her face was lit up with a bright enthusiasm, as she looked at the hat. But that expressive countenance saddened suddenly. She recollected Philip Gorhambury, and that he had made game of her father's hat, and had said that Mr. Lovel looked like a beggar in it; and that there was stinginess, as well as economy, in going about in that way, and that everybody thought her father was either stingy, or an oddity, for wearing such a preposterous hat. She had gone into a vehement passion upon the occasion; still Philip, who loved and admired her above all things, had at length pacified her by saying that he did not think this of her father, that he only meant to tell her what others said, and begging her to be rational, and try to persuade her father to mend his shocking bad hat.

All this had been working in her mind very uncomfortable for some time; and it came into it just now. She could not bear the thought of her father

es being mistaken, and he held up to ridicule in  
vay; and she now resolved upon trying to per-  
him to get another hat upon occasion of his visit  
dy Aylmer.

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## CHAPTER X.

THE little Hernana was at this time about eight years old; but she was so very fine and intelligent child, and so accustomed, motherless girl as she was to act for herself, that she in many things appeared much older, and might be considered as quite a little woman. Her father's singular character, his extreme goodness, his genius and his energy, united with the indifference to all merely conventional matters which distinguished him, had called forth, in this clever and remarkable creature, many faculties which in general lie still dormant at her age.

Hernana was observant, prudent, and provident, careful of her own little concerns, and indefatigable in helping the one maid-servant — an old woman, who had lived ever since Lovel himself had been born, in the family — in all that she could. The child was indefatigable in assisting this aged person in every duty she had to perform; from sweeping rooms, and peeling potatoes, to what the little girl loved best of all — mending her father's clothes, and washing and starching his bands.

Her father she loved with that sort of profound attachment that one may suppose a little dog, if it could speak, would express for its master. And no wonder, for Lovel was gentle and tender in the extreme; and though somewhat melancholy and thoughtful in his deportment, a gentle gaiety would play

a lambent flame around him, and make him little short of adorable. Upon the subject of her father's equipment, as regarded his outer man, Hernana was anxious, not so much from her own observation — for children of that age are not usually very regardful of such things — but because she had heard Mrs. Alworthy — for by that title was the one servant dignified — very often lament it. The good woman saying, what a pity it was, that so beautiful a young man as her master should dress almost no better than a beggar.

But little did Lovel heed either the hints of good Mrs. Alworthy, or the representations of his little girl. So long as there was one poor creature among his parishioners wanting bread, the money in his pocket was sure to find its way to the baker's, instead to the tailor's or hatter's. Not that he felt or affected any philosophical indifference as regarded these things, but that really it was impossible to him, to spend any money upon himself, so long as there were others that wanted it more; and he was, moreover, very poor.

The half-pay of a captain in a line regiment, and eighty pounds a-year, his stipend as curate to Mr. Gorhambury, was all that he possessed. About fifty pounds a-year of this was expended in a life insurance, to provide for his little girl at his death. So having sacrificed so large a portion of his income to domestic prudence, he felt that what remained ought more especially to be devoted to those calls of humanity so urgent upon those of his profession, who perform its duties as they ought.

A little sum — not much — but a little sum was also dedicated to the indulgence of dressing his child somewhat better than he dressed himself. His coat might



be threadbare, and his hat worn out; but his Hernana simply as she was always attired, must be respectable and nice.

Mrs. Alworthy lent herself to this last peculiarity with abundant good-will, and for a trifling sum kept the little girl so neatly, that she never had to feel ashamed of her appearance among her young friends and neighbours.

And Hernana loved the pretty straw hat with pink ribbons, which Mrs. Alworthy had just trimmed for her, with all her heart; and the pleasure of a walk with her father, and a visit to Lady Aylmer, was very much increased by the being desired to put it on. Perhaps, too, she might meet Philip Gorhambury: he had not seen her in her new hat.

She wondered whether they must pass the Rectory to go to Lady Aylmer's. But now again she meditates upon her father's hat; and the more she looks at it, the shabbier she thinks it: in truth, she could not think it shabbier than it really was; and she also remembers that Philip Gorhambury made game of it yesterday — only yesterday. Her father must have a new hat.

She was a privileged person. She might go into her father's little study whenever she would. If he were busy, or if he were melancholy, he would gently send her out again; but most often he took her upon his knee, and cheered his mind with a little prattling and joking before he let her go. So she made no scruple of opening his study door, and there she found him with an open drawer before him. The drawer, in fact, was that in which he kept his money; which money (strange employment for him to be caught in) *he was counting and recounting, over and over.* Th

treasure was made up of pieces but small in value — shillings, sixpences, pence and half-pence. He sighed as he gathered the tiny heap in his hand; and then shuffling it into the farther division of the drawer, he shut it, and looked up with —

“And what do you come for, my little girl?”

She had the hat in her hand.

“Papa, I am come to talk to you about your hat.”

“Well, child! But you haven’t brushed it, Hernana. You are a little sloven. I thought you would have made it quite spruce by this time.”

“Mrs. Alworthy says it is not brushable.”

“Nonsense, of Mrs. Alworthy. It looks bad, to be sure,” said he, regarding it with a queer sort of smile; “and how it is to last me six months longer, may be a question to be asked; but it must do for the present, my love.”

“Oh, papa! but Mrs. Alworthy, and Philip Gorbambury, and everybody, say it is so shabby.”

“I am sorry for that.”

“Philip says he should be quite ashamed, if he was me, to walk out with such a hat.”

“Does he? And does Mrs. Alworthy?”

“No; she never said so; but Philip does, over and over.”

“And *are* you ashamed, Hernana?”

“Why — why, no; but,” and the colour rose to her olive cheek, “I do wish you *would* buy a new hat. Do, dear papa, do.”

“But if I have no money to buy one?”

“*Dear* papa, but you have some money. You

were counting a great big heap of money, as big as this, when I came into the room."

"But suppose I want the money for other things?"

"Oh! but what other things? Nothing shows so much as a hat. Philip says —"

"What does Philip say?"

"He says — oh, papa! it's so shocking — that people call you stingy, and think you mean and a miser; for nobody else would dress so unlike a gentleman. That's what he says, papa; and it makes me almost cry to hear him."

"Come here, my little Hernana, (for you look ready, at all events, to cry now), and sit down upon your father's lap, and let us talk about it. Does my child say that everybody cries shame upon her father, because he does not get himself a new hat? And do they call it mean and miserly? Was that it? What is mean and miserly, little woman? Do you know what those terms signify?"

"Something very horrid, I am sure; and what everybody hates; and what you are not, I am certain, papa; for everybody loves you."

"That's very good of everybody, I am sure, when a man wears a shabby hat. I did not think there had been so much goodness in the world. So it's mean and miserly in me, is it, Hernana?"

"So they say, and I can't bear to hear it. Do, pray, papa, get a new hat."

"A mean person," Mr. Lovel went on, bending his beautiful, serious eyes upon his daughter's face, "is one who spares his money by taking unfair *advantages* of others; who endeavours to obtain services *unrecompensed*; and to discharge duties — the duties

of hospitality, liberality, and generosity — by halves, in order to save the appearance, and spare the cost. Dost thou understand me, child?"

"Yes, papa, I do."

"A miser is one," Mr. Lovel continued, "who hoards his money for no purpose, but to gratify the base desire of mere possession — the sin of covetousness. Now, Hernana, though it does not become a man to speak up for himself, this once I must do it. I am *not* mean, for the person on whom I spare is myself, not another: I am *not* miserly, for the money I save is not intended to be hoarded. Child, we are very poor people, you and I, and it is difficult for the poor to walk uprightly, and honourably, and liberally, and generously; and it is most especially difficult to avoid false shame. But, my dear, we must be all these things, and we *must* defy false shame, if we would acquit ourselves to God and to our own consciences. You understand me, I see you do," he went on, for the expressive eyes of the little girl showed that she did. "And now I will tell you why I have not, and why I cannot for a long time, have a hat. There is a man in this city who has fallen into great poverty by no fault of his own, and his children are crying for bread. He is not a beggar: he cannot take refuge in the workhouse with his children — he would rather lie down and die than do that. He once, when my father was in difficulties, lent him money: I must now lend *him* money. What I have, he shall have. It would cost me a guinea to buy a new hat — half of all I can spare at present: I choose to give it to this man, to buy bread for his children, *Hernana*; and I will wear a shabby hat, call me mean

and miserly who may. Shall you be ashamed to walk with me now Hernana?"

She made no answer; she still held the hat. Presently she began to press it to her bosom, and to cover it with kisses — with tears. She slid down from her father's knee, carrying the hat with her. Oh! how she and Mrs. Alworthy brushed and smoothed, and did the impossible to improve its appearance! And they so far succeeded that when Mr. Lovel put it upon his head, he declared that he did not know his own hat again!

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And now, father and daughter, hand in hand, are making their way to Lady Aylmer's. They have to pass the Rectory, and Hernana casts wistful looks at the windows upon the garden side of the house; for their path lay by the wall, towards which Philip's room looked. But no Philip is to be seen. They turn the angle of the garden, and then they command a view of the front door. There is a chariot-and-four standing before it; which is being loaded with trunks and imperials; the postilions, in smart scarlet jackets, are standing whip in hand upon the causeway; and the lady's-maid is packing the inside of the carriage.

"Heyday!" says Mr. Lovel, "off so soon!"

"Where is Mr. Gorhambury going?" asks Hernana.

"Why, to the Castle in Wales, of course; which has just come into Mr. Gorhambury's pos-

session, where else? But here is your friend Philip."

Philip was hurrying down the steps; he had a gun-case in his hand, containing a new gun, the first gun he had ever possessed; and was followed by two pointers, the first game dogs he had ever called his own, having begged them from his mother as the first boon to be granted on occasion of his father's accession of fortune. He was very proud of these acquisitions, as most boys of his age, which was about twelve, would have been. And he seemed too much engaged, in giving orders in a somewhat imperious manner, with respect to the bestowal of his property, to be able to regard the little girl with coal-black hair, beautiful olive skin, and large dark eyes, who, in her best hat, was coming down the street, hand and hand with her father.

"Hallo! Can't you get out of the way? Why, I declare, it is you, Mr. Lovel; how do you do? Hernana! where *did* you get that pretty hat?"

Hernana smiled, and coloured, and held out her little hand to him demurely, saying:

"But where are *you* going to, Philip?"

"Oh, haven't you heard? Perhaps not — my father kept it secret a little while; but now, everybody knows. He's come into a splendid fortune, and we are all going to live at a magnificent castle that he's got. So good-by to G —, except when he's in residence."

Her countenance was clouded over with an expression of sudden dismay, quite pathetic in so young a *child*.

"Going away! going away!" she faltered; "you, Philip, going away?"

He looked at her; boy as he was, he already loved her passionately. His look said:

"Do you care, darling? Do you care?"

He flung down his gun-case, caught her in his arms, kissed her, and said:

"Go where I will, I will soon be back wherever you are, Hernana. It's no great way off; I shall be always coming to see you. May I, Mr. Lovel? Shall I, Mr. Lovel?"

"We will talk of that some other time. Come along, my little girl."

She followed, holding her father's hand; but her head turned the contrary way, her eyes fixed upon Philip and the carriage which was to carry him off. He kept making signs to her which she well understood, and with them her heart was cheered and satisfied.

They soon lost sight of the Rectory door; and turning down another street, which led to the fields, entered upon a pleasant common, which spread towards the mountains, and round which were various small cottages of gentility. They rang at the bell of the wicket which led to the one belonging to Lady Aylmer.

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"Mr. Lovel, my Lady," said the maid, opening the door of the small sitting-room, in which Lady Aylmer was lying upon a sofa, placed near the window.

The room was arranged with a certain elegance which bespoke the refined habits of the possessor. The windows were open, looking upon a flower-garden, and were embowered in clematis and abundant roses of various colours. The furniture was neat; and there were several ornaments in Dresden china, groupes in alabaster, bijouterie, &c., with a few choice pictures which had adorned Lady Aylmer's dressing-room in better days, and were unquestionably her own property. Upon a beautifully inlaid table, in the centre of the room, was a fine vase of Bohemian glass, filled with lovely flowers. Everything around was so arranged, as to strike the imagination with a sense of poetic beauty; but what so beautiful as Lady Aylmer herself? The deep black; the peculiar, almost monastic form, of the head-dress she wore; the lovely features — so wan, so pale, so delicate, so instinct with feeling, so interesting from the vestiges of her recent anguish — rendered her altogether the most lovely picture that could be imagined. She strove to rise, as the servant opened the door, but fell back again. With a cry of surprise, she clasped her hands together, when the Curate entered the room:

"You! you! Is it possible? How changed! yet, how unchanged! You, Lovel? Captain Lovel!"

"Louisa!" in a voice of much emotion: "Louisa! Yes, I thought, I feared, and yet, I hoped — Louisa! Do we indeed meet again?"

"Do we meet again? Ah! Captain Lovel! yes, yes; but how? but how?"

"How? indeed!"

"*He is gone; they are gone; all are gone. My*



husband, Lord Aylmer — ah! you never saw him. My boy! my little one! all, all lost!”

“I had heard it. I feared, and yet I hoped: feared it was you, yet could not — could not help hoping — to see you again — even thus —”

He was evidently very much affected. He turned away, and walked to one of the pictures, pretending to examine it, and striving to compose himself. Whilst he did so, Lady Aylmer, who seemed to find it much less difficult to recover her composure, stretched out her hand, and said:

“Come hither, my nice little girl. Are you Captain Lovel’s daughter?”

“Papa isn’t a captain now, he’s a clergyman,” said Hernana.

“Ah! And how long has Captain Lovel left the army?” she said, turning to him.

He looked round at this. That face! that face! oh, that face! What a host of emotions overwhelmed him! He turned away again. He would have given worlds to emulate her serenity — her cruel, cruel indifference, as he could not help calling it. But no; it was impossible.

She saw how it was with him — sighed, as certain recollections passed over her mind, but did not seem in the least to share in his agitation. She drew the little girl towards her, held her hand, and kept gazing at her with pleasure and curiosity, perusing her features with a wondering air. Then having, as she thought, given him sufficient time to compose himself, *she said:*

“Captain Lovel married in Spain? I think I heard so. And this little girl? and the lady herself?”

"Yes," said he, turning round at last, and looking gravely and sadly, "yes, he who was Captain Lovel married in Spain, and it was to the mother of that little girl — *my* little girl — all that is left to me in this world, for *she* is dead."

"Ah! death is cruel, death devours all," she said; "the best, the most precious, all go — all go!"

The idea of death is the only one which can hold the balance with that of love. It solemnizes, it pacifies, it exalts. Love and death are kin to each other. When she spoke of death, the wild emotions which for a moment had overpowered Mr. Lovel, at thus beholding restored, in more than earthly beauty, the idol of his first affections, the woman he had so passionately loved, subsided into something sweet and holy. He drew a chair by the sofa, took his little girl's other hand in his; and thus, as it were, calmed and strengthened by the presence of one who recalled the memory of a later love, he said gently:

"I never thought to see you in this world again."

"You see me now," she answered, "as one scarcely belonging to this world; for all I loved have perished, and the earth is a dark desert to me. You, too —"

"Have lost that which I loved — that which loved me, as none ever can or will love me again."

"But you have this child; and I —" She uttered all this without shedding a tear: her tears seemed exhausted. Then fixing her beautiful eyes upon *Hernana*, she said: "My very soul is knitting itself to this child. Her name?"

"*Hernana*."

"*Hernana*, can you love me?"

*Hernana* fixed her eyes gravely upon the lady, not

quite understanding this scene — as how should she? She recollected what her father had told her of Lady Aylmer. She thought her the most beautiful creature that she had ever beheld, and all that surrounded her more like some beautiful dream of fairyland than anything real. She was bewildered with delight. And this lovely lady spoke so kindly, too.

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The friendship, thus begun, continued. Lady Aylmer became excessively attached to the little girl, and Hernana returned her affection with a love amounting almost to worship.

Mr. Lovel understood the terms to which Lady Aylmer intended to confine him; but that which, some years before, had driven him to Spain — a man desperate, and distracted with an unhappy passion — he was now able to rejoice in, as a calm and sweet solace for his remaining life. Her friendship, the offer of which, ten years ago, had driven him to frenzy, was now received as a precious gift of inestimable value.

To see, his little girl thus adopted by one so endowed with genius and accomplishments, was in itself a matter of unspeakable delight. The young creature, who might have been in danger of becoming singular through the originality of her thoughts, and the noble simplicity of her temper, under such guidance would be trained into all that the heart of father could desire. And so it proved. Hernana grew up, under *these auspices*, everything that could be wished; though *that she preserved much of her native originality*, as

continued to be very unlike most of the young ladies around her. She retained all her simple habits of activity and usefulness; habits, indeed, which her father's narrow circumstances only rendered the more necessary as she grew up, and became, unavoidably, a source of somewhat increased expense.

The extreme simplicity of the life she led emancipated her from those fetters, which the conventionalism of general society unavoidably imposes; and this freedom of thought and action, the noble sentiments of her disinterested and warm affection for the two who so well deserved to inspire it; an habitual course of self-sacrifice in smaller, as well as in greater things; the absolute necessity of being content without those vanities, luxuries, and pleasures, which the wealth of those around her enabled them to command, had given a noble elevation to her character. And this shone forth in her countenance, in her form, in her gestures. Her expression was sweet, earnest, fervent; her eyes, when melting with feeling, or kindling with energy, had in them those depths of sensibility which exercise such a strange influence over us all. Her figure, tall and finely formed, was erect as that of a young sapling drawn up amid surrounding trees, unheeded by man, but pruned by the hand of Nature herself, and fed by the great mother; rising graceful, complete, and straight towards heaven. Her voice and gestures insensibly softened by communication with one so refined as Lady Aylmer, had in them a something inconceivably charming. Free, without boldness; graceful, without affectation; expressive of everything that was lovely, generous, or feeling. A charming creature, indeed!

*And great was the comfort the lonely and childless*  
*Castle Avon. I.*

widow experienced in the strong and fervent attachment which she had inspired, and in the occupation she found in thus training the promising girl. Her mind was by these means preserved from sinking into that state of morbid languor and apathy which is but too frequently the result of affections irrevocably absorbed by — of living, with as it were — the dead; for with the dead, the reality of Lady Aylmer's life might be said to be.

The memory of the husband she had loved so tenderly, was cherished by her with a sacredness of devotion, which forbade the substitution, even in thought, of any other object; and this devotion, perhaps, it was which rendered her friendship for Mr. Lovel so soothing, because it was so single-hearted and sincere. The danger to the health of her mind arose not so much from this devotion to her husband's memory — a feeling wholesome, holy, and far from singular — but from the remarkable position with which she stood as regarded her child, which she had loved with a passion rare even in so young and ardent a heart as hers.

In spite of all that had occurred, the persuasion which she had from the first entertained, that the child was not dead, remained, and was only strengthened by years. She had ceased to speak upon the subject to any one; even to Mr. Lovel, in their most confidential moments, this was not touched upon. It seemed as if the persuasion, which was the secret joy and consolation of her heart, was to her like some *beautiful image long entombed, which would crumble into dust, vanish and cease to be, if exposed to the common air.*

The glove lay in her bosom day and night. That glove was to her heart as her little child. There were moments when imagination worked so strongly, that she almost could believe that so it was! Her whole internal life was made up of the idea — that even in this world she should see her child again. The when — the how, was the subject of constant alternations of hope and fear. But there was one terrible anxiety which, but for her extraordinary strength of mind, might have well-nigh upset it: and that was — the doubt as to the condition in which her child might be now!

This idea would at times present itself with such agonizing force, that it seemed as if her mind must altogether give way under the horror of the suppositions which presented themselves. Then she could only cast herself — poor helpless mother! — upon God, beseeching Him, with cries and tears of anguished prayer, to shield and protect her little one from misery, and worse, far worse than misery — contamination. But, mercifully for her — and, as it may seem to us, scarcely credible — most often her feelings upon this subject were hopeful and calm. It seemed as if borne in upon her mind, that wherever placed, or however situated, her child was doing well.

She dwelt upon his loveliness, the intelligence and sweetness upon which she had so passionately doted; and she seemed to feel assured that the power of their fascinations — wherever exercised — would be felt. She pictured him as radiant in beauty, and surrounded with love. And these sweet delusions of the fancy

happily dwelt with her with almost as much  
city, as the conviction that the boy was not lo  
that sooner or later he would be restored.

Such is a faint attempt to picture the state  
Aylmer's mind.

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## CHAPTER XI.

THE waste of waters lay before, behind, around him; but still he held the child clasped with the left arm to his bosom, whilst with the right he shook the bridle, and with knee and voice urged and encouraged the horse to breast the current, and swim on. The rain fell thick and fast, the clouds were heavy, the sun had set some quarter of an hour. It began to grow so dark, that objects at any distance could scarcely be perceived; the opposite bank, however, was still visible, and towards it the rider pressed onward.

The generous animal he rode, made almost supernatural efforts to stem the torrent, which, towards the middle of what was now become rather a lake than a river, rushed with violence towards the sea. Every now and then the horse seemed to falter; and the rider's cheek became paler, and his heart almost ceased to beat from fear and anxiety. Not that he lost one thought upon his own fate; he only felt for the precious child that nestled in his bosom — silent, determined, and brave as himself.

The little boy had, in a few brief sentences, been made to understand the nature of the danger, and the necessity for keeping himself perfectly still, so as not to disturb the equilibrium of either horse or rider; and with a heroism, not uncommon among children *his age*, he preserved the most resolute silence,



fixing his large blue eyes upon the waters before him, and quietly expecting his fate.

Forward! forward! brave struggling steed! Yet one other desperate effort, and the rushing torrent shall be passed. And now they have reached the smoother water, which by this time had covered all the low broken ground extending to the banks; and so, sometimes swimming, sometimes wading, the horse made his way; and already the steep road of yellow clay, which led upwards towards the mountains, became discernible; and to it Mr. Yates guided his steed. Slippery and steep it was, and difficult the scramble out of the water; but the gallant horse struggled with what strength he now had left, made his footing good, and was climbing up the bank, when, from the thickets which closely overhung this hollow way, strange apparitions suddenly appeared. Dark forms of men, with black locks, black flashing eyes, lean, sinewy figures; and women, with wild yet beautiful features. Every face, however, lighted up with a sort of ferocious energy, as they rushed down suddenly from the bushes; and surrounding the horse, began to attack him and his rider.

The man and child were soon dragged down; and as Mr. Yates was falling, a heavy blow from a bludgeon struck his face, cutting the skin, and drawing blood, some of which dropped upon the saddle as he sank to the ground, still holding the child, now mute with terror, in his arms. The horse, making a desperate effort, extricated himself from the crowd, and galloped at the top of his speed home.

*His rider lay extended upon the earth, face upwards, looking round at the hideous and malignant*

countenances which surrounded him. He knew, well enough, where he was, and what he had to expect; for two fiendish eyes were glaring upon him — from a woman's face — or rather, from the face of a female fury.

"Ay!" she cried, in her peculiar language, which her victim, however, in some degree understood. "You have it now! Your turn is come at last! You, who sent an honest mother's son — a loving wife's husband — over the salt seas, thousands of miles away, for filching a horse or a sheep. Ay! you have it now! Your turn is come at last! Not *over* — but *in*. Heave him up lads! heave him up! But give him a quieter first; for he can swim like an otter."

"What I did," answered the good and brave man, fixing his eyes calmly and resolutely upon hers, now flashing upon him like two baleful meteors. "What I did, was in defence of the laws of the land; which you, and yours, spend your lives in breaking. I am at your mercy; you must do with me what you will; but spare the child! the young, innocent child! He has done you no injury."

"Ha! ha! ha! Spare the child — a likely story. *He* has not hurt the Busné, not he! No! no! no! but those he belongs to, have. Who has persecuted the children of Egypt like his father? he, the fine lord, the magistrate. Did he not sign the warrant with his own hand which sent my child to the gaol, and from the gaol over the salt, salt sea. Ha! ha! No harm has he? Let him feel what it is to be childless, like me. Come here; give me the yellow-haired brat. I'll send him over those waters from which they *never return, and you to keep him company, Squire Yates.*"

"Spare the child! spare the child!" cried Yates, struggling and endeavouring to free himself from the gripe of the gipsies, who had fastened upon him, and in a manner pinned him down, whilst this colloquy with the beldame was going on; "spare the child! As there is a God above, who sooner or later will take vengeance upon a foul murder, spare the child, and do with me what you will!"

"Give me the child! give me the chicken with the golden feathers and the blue sapphire eyes. Give — give — let me wring his neck before those eyes, and teach Master Yates, and those with whom he consorts, what it is to rouse the blood of the Callo to fury."

And she turned fiercely round, and made a clutch at the boy, who, speechless with terror, his large blue eyes wide staring and aghast, his beautiful golden hair streaming over his shoulders, gazed upon the scene, unable to utter a sound, or shed a tear.

He had been lifted from the ground, and was now in the arms of a tall, strapping young woman, whose limbs, remarkable for their beautiful proportions, showed the sinewy strength of an Amazon, and whose splendid features were lighted up with excitement.

"Give him to me! give him to me!" furiously shouted the old gipsy woman.

"Never, never, never!" shrieked the other, with a wild laugh of defiance. "Never, never, never! for is he not beautiful as a fairy child, with his heaven-blue eyes, and his locks of pale gold. And is he not brave as a lioness's whelp, the bold and beautiful one? See, *he neither utters a cry, nor sheds a tear.*" And she clasped him passionately to her breast. "And is he

“It mine? my jewel, my treasure, my idol, and my  
m! Fear nothing, my little angel thing, fear nothing;  
ou art mine, mine, mine!” And again she lifted up  
e beautiful child, and uttered a scream of wild de-  
nace.

The old gipsy rushed through the circle of men,  
omen, and children assembled round the captured  
an, outside of which the beautiful Hesther now stood,  
lding up, with uplifted arms, her prize in triumph.  
e made a furious snatch at him.

“Hold fast, hold fast, little one!” cried Hesther;  
d the little one clasped his arms closely round her  
ck. “Catch who catch can;” and starting off, and  
shing with the speed of a race-horse into the thicket,  
e was instantly out of sight.

The wretched old woman looked after her for a  
ment, then shrugging her shoulders with an expres-  
n of malignant satisfaction, which seemed to say,  
“I’ll have him soon,” returned to the spot where Mr.  
tes still lay, watching with anxiety, amounting to  
ony; the result of the contest. His ideas were be-  
ning confused, and a heaviness, as of death, was  
on him; still he was able to see that the child for  
moment was rescued; but farther his thoughts  
ld not go, for death, under its most hideous form,  
s staring him in the face.

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“Not there, but here, you fool of the world! Why,  
en the rush from the hills is over, and the tide has  
zed, will he not be left exposed to the sun, as

plain to be seen as a stranded seal? No, no, not there. In the pool that has no bottom, or a bottom which lies in the pit of darkness. There — drop him in there.”

The body of the unfortunate man was lifted up by two or three desperate-looking young fellows; and led by the beldame, who appeared to feel, though her vengeance was satiated, not the slightest compunction for what she had done, they proceeded along the rugged and broken banks of the river.

At some little distance, surrounded by precipitous rocks, was one of those black, sleeping pools, of depth unfathomable, which possibly may be the craters of extinct volcanoes.

The scene around was one of utter desolation, of blackened, rugged rocks, bare of vegetation, where not the least shrub was found growing, nor the least sign of animal life to be heard; and here, whilst the rain still fell in floods, rather than torrents, and the wind, howling mournfully between the rocks, sang his dirge, was the unfortunate Yates consigned to the deep waters.

They flung him in silently: even they, savage as they were, could not utter their usual shout of triumphant vengeance over their fallen foe. For Yates was a righteous, just, and good man; and whilst, in obedience to the savage commands of their leader and queen, they had most cruelly murdered him, there was a something that awed even them. The man breathes not, however depraved, who does not instinctively acknowledge and reverence genuine worth.

*Their blood was up, and they murdered him ruthlessly; but when that was done, the passions of*

all, save those of the furious woman, seemed assuaged. In silence they raised him — in silence they bore him along; silently they flung the body into the pool, and stood watching the dark waters as they closed over him; all silent, except the Fury who presided over this scene of cruelty, she alone uttered a loud scream of triumph as the waters received her victim. No one echoed it.

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Hesther felt the soft clinging arms of the little boy about her neck, hanging there in terror unspeakable, yet with childish confidence that he should find protection; and all her strong, warm, woman's heart was moved. She clasped her nervous, beautiful arms closely round him; pressed him to her bosom — felt as if she had seized some inestimable treasure; and that all she had lost was restored.

It was not long since Hesther, a young mother herself, had buried a child of about the same age as the unfortunate heir of Avon. He had been a dark gipsy-boy, with coal-black hair and eyes. She had loved him with passion, because he was like herself; but with a still more vehement passion her imagination had fastened upon the child she now held, because nothing could be more unlike herself, her son, her tribe, than he.

The moment she beheld him, she had been seized with a strange ravishment, such as one feels when something more glorious and beautiful than the soul has ever pictured, is presented to the eyes. She had *bounded upon him like a hen eagle*, and had clasped

Kim in her strong arms, whilst she stood with the rest to witness the terrible execution about to be done.

Her heart was a warm and loving one; her nature passionate, devoted, and with the strongest instinct for all that was generous and great. She had lost her own child, through whom all these ardent affections had been satisfied; and she had been a widowed, desolate creature ever since; and now, with a sort of wild ecstasy, as she pressed the golden-haired and beautiful child of the Chalié to her heart, she felt that heart to be again overflowing with sentiments more vehement than ever. The darkness of the soul was dispelled; the frozen currents of the blood loosened: Hesther was herself again.

The idea of the child being taken from her, and sacrificed to the old mother's revenge, had not entered her head, or that any one would dispute her possession of the treasure which she had picked up, as a discarded thing which nobody cared to possess. But the sudden attack upon him had roused her, as we have seen; and her first impulse had been to fly, to dash forward, and escape with her prize into the wilderness.

Not that she feared the old woman, queen though she might be; no, nor mortal man or woman of earth's mould: Hesther feared nothing — nothing above, nothing beneath, nothing around her. It was only in obedience to an instinctive impulse to snatch the child from immediate danger, that she had taken flight; and *she had no intention of continuing it to any great distance, or absenting herself from the encampment to*

which her tribe were accustomed, at nightfall, to repair.

She felt strong enough to guard her newly-acquired possession against all pretenders, be they who they might. She had reason, however, to apprehend nothing, except from the old woman; for Hesther was beloved, as well as feared — had excited universal sympathy, through her passionate grief at the loss of her own child, and she felt that every one of the brotherhood would rejoice in her new joy.

Hesther had shared with the old gipsy in the enmity she had felt against Mr. Yates; for she, too, had suffered intensely from that gentleman's perseverance in carrying out the ends of justice. Her own husband had shared the fate of the father and son, whose sentence of transportation for life had filled the heart of the bereaved mother with such deep and unrelenting vengeance.

The old woman had shown the strength of her affections, and her passionate sense of injury, by storms of the wildest fury, whenever the subject was even alluded to; venting her grief in the most dreadful imprecations — calling down vengeance upon the head, and uttering the most fearful threats against the common foe.

Such were her hours of excitement. In her more ordinary moods, she was silent, gloomy; impatient and surly, when spoken to; going about the different affairs in which she was engaged with indifference; and, as I said before, whenever the subject of her grief was mentioned, *bursting forth into the wildest paroxysms of rage.*



She was, in fact, in these quiet moments, engaged in planning schemes of vengeance; and as nothing less than the life of her enemy could satisfy her, this she resolved to obtain. Wily as a beast of prey creeping stealthily through the thicket, watching the moment to make the fatal and unerring spring, she had waited for several months, till the trial and condemnation of the three gipsies had been almost forgotten, and she had found her opportunity; and then no fury of the 'Halles' in Paris ever quenched her thirst for blood in a more horrible and barbarous manner.

But Hesther took things differently. The beautiful young woman, carrying her child at her breast, had followed the dark-haired Ro, whom she loved with a passion approaching to frenzy, from prison to the hulks, from the hulks till she saw him on the deck of the ship which was to carry him to exile.

With what wild and vehement embraces, with what passionate but tearless eyes, with what broken exclamations of her love and sorrow, had the parting been made! The ship was under weigh. They put the poor gipsy girl, now frantic with sorrow, on board the boat, and they rowed to land. One of the sailors, humane and kind, took care of the baby; for, desperate with grief, the mother had endeavoured, with the child in her arms, to spring over the bulwarks of the ship, and bury herself and it in the ocean. Her infant had been taken from her; and Jack held it tenderly to his rugged bosom, whilst some of the others endeavoured, in their rough way, to console the mother.

*Her anguish was so vehement and so sincere, that it excited the compassion of all.*

"Come, my good young woman, be comforted. He's a fine young chap, no doubt, and a handsome; but better fish than ever were caught, are still swimming in the sea. Don't take on so. And then there's the child, too!"

"Let me be! Let me alone! What do you hold me for? Let me go into the cool, sweet water; for my head is all on fire! And my baby! my fatherless baby! Oh! let us bury ourselves under the billows! My Ro! — my Ro! — Jephtha! — Jephtha! — my Ro! my Ro!"

They got her, however, safely to land; and then they had the humanity to lead her carefully through the sea-port town from which the convict ship had sailed, till they reached the fields beyond, and out of hearing of the great and terrible sea.

The wind blew fresh and wavingsly over the wide pastures, now green with waving grass, and filled with red clover and golden king cups. The larks sprang aloft, singing gladsomely in the air; the herds were out in the fields, the sheep upon the hills. She had passed through the town, her head upon her breast, never once lifting up her eyes; a sailor, on each side, holding one of her arms, and followed by the man who carried her baby.

They brought her about a mile onwards, to a charming little rising ground, that commanded a view of the sweet country — of a village nestling among trees, and the hoar steeple of the church peeping forth from the branches. There they stopped.

She lifted up her head — looked round. Her eye recovered its lustre; lambent beams of light seemed to shoot into and brighten it. Her bosom heaved, as it

were, with fresh life; her lips parted, as if to inhale the sweet air. She snatched her baby from the man who held it, clasped it close to her bosom, and without uttering one word, good or bad, plunged into a deep and woody lane, and was lost to sight.

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## CHAPTER XII.

FROM that time Hesther had quietly rejoined her e, and had followed their usual vagrant life. had taken her sorrow in a fashion of her own, y and sternly; she never had been seen to shed r; she never once mentioned her Ro. When , the old mother, was giving way to the violence passion in curses and imprecations, threatening ance the most horrible, upon the author of their y, Hesther, her boy in her arms, would stand g fixedly at her, with a sort of wonder, mingled scorn.

"This is not the way," her countenance said. "is not the way such should be mourned."

Then she would turn aside, and go alone into the and deep lanes, her baby in her arms, and so r for hours. Whether at these times she wept mourned; whether she too, in her way, meditated ge, is unknown. Certain it is, that when the had returned to the neighbourhood of Castle

after a wandering of nearly eight months, and arah was openly employed in planning the deon of Mr. Yates, Hesther offered not the slightest nce to her proceedings, and she seemed to share in the general sentiment, that a sort of wild demanded a victim. That for the trifling of as the whole gipsy society deemed it, of stealing *three men should be cut off from the land of*

*on. I.*

the living, not hanged, it was true, but sentenced to what, in their eyes, was almost more dreadful than death, seemed to *demand* retribution. She readily agreed in this, though she said little; and at the different consultations upon the subject, contented herself with standing there, a tall, imposing figure, giving to the assembly the sanction of her presence.

It was during this time that a sudden change came over her existence, threatening to darken the little light that was left in it. Her boy, as he was sleeping in her arms under a hedge, had been stung, as it was supposed, by an adder. She was wakened by his shrieks; there was a small wound upon the little bare ankle; and the child swelled, sickened and died, before the common remedies in use among these people, upon such occasions, could be applied.

From that day Hesther closed her lips in silence. In silence, she carried her baby, wrapped in a fine silk shawl, which she had purchased or filched, no one knowing how she came into possession of it, to the little grave. It was dug under a towering wild rose-tree, now covered with a profusion of sweet flowers, in the deep dingle among the hills where the gipsies were then encamped. She lifted the little lifeless form in her arms, raised it in a sort of agony of despair towards the sky, then she pressed the pallid lips with hers, now as colourless as those of death itself; and once having touched them, it seemed as if some flood-gate of the spirit had given way: she rained kisses and embraces upon the body with a vehemence *amounting* to frenzy.

*Suddenly* she appeared to recollect herself, and *recover her self-command and heroism.* She broug

her little one to the side of the grave, kneeled down, deposited it there, laying it carefully and settling the delicate limbs as if in a bed; then she raised herself, and stood by silent, whilst her friends and companions speedily shovelled the moulds over the body; that over, she turned round, and walked home.

She upon this occasion did as she had before done. In her desolation she sought no sympathy, she chose to be alone; she never mentioned her sorrow to any one. She went on with her usual occupations as before — telling fortunes, or preparing simples, or whatever else it might chance to be; but the slightest approach to courtship, or gallantry, upon the part of any of the young men of her clan was rejected with an almost fearful violence. For regarding her to all intents and purposes as a widow, many sought her hand in gipsy fashion; but the proud heroine treated their addresses with contempt and horror.

Thus Hesther had for the last three months lived desolate, her heart yearning in its dreariness for it knew not what; when, as she stood by, a cold spectator of the violence offered to Mr. Yates, her eye had been attracted by the beautiful child, as he fell out of the arms of the man they were tearing from his horse. She had sprung forward, at first through the mere woman's instinct, to rescue an infant; but, no sooner did her arms enclose another — a living child! a child without defence — a child belonging to no one! a child that might be to her as her own! than the intensest of affections was rekindled in her heart.

The unfortunate Dido herself, was not more fatally and madly entangled in the meshes woven for her by *he feigned Astyanax*, than was this bereaved mother,

as she pressed the golden-haired child of the stranger to her bosom.

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The execution is over: the gipsies have returned to their tents. The encampment is situated in a sort of crater basin, sunk among the mountains, and entirely filled on all sides with trees. Tall ash and aspens rise like columns to the sky, lifting their green and waving heads above the birches, hazels and alders, with which the dingle is crowded so as to be almost impervious. The gipsies, however, have their paths through the labyrinth, and in the centre stands the encampment. It is placed just where a well of pure water, clear as crystal, walled in by stones covered with mosses, green as emerald, comes bubbling up, and steals away, creeping among the trees and long grass.

There was a rather large assemblage of gipsies here; and they passed away their time making horse-shoes, mending pots and pans, transmogrifying horses, or collecting and preparing simples, or maybe poisons, according to the customs, time out of mind, of this mysterious community. All round this basin the mountains rose precipitously, with bare and blackened rocks, between which green shrubs were growing, and woodbines and fumarias hanging their light and lovely tendrils. The scattered huts; the horses and asses tethered to the various trees, where little open glades of grass presented themselves; the smoke from the fires curling through the green leaves towards the blue sky above; the wild and shaggy figures formed also

gether a romantic and beautiful picture, which many among this half-savage race had quite imagination enough to comprehend and enjoy. And who more than Hesther? So to this place, as soon as the night had fallen, still carrying the boy upon her bosom, who, his arms clasped round her neck, had fallen asleep, she returned.

Here the storm had passed away, and the clouds were clearing from the sky. Star after star was peeping forth in the heavens. The pale light from a crescent moon cast now and then a silvery stream upon the grass and huts; but, wherever the trees grew thick, all rested in deepest shadow. One or two fires might be seen glowing red upon the ground, and sending up volumes of smoke; and the large black pots, filled with an indiscriminate mixture of game and poultry — spoil of the woods and farm-yards in the neighbourhood — were seething over the fire, and giving out a pleasant savour.

But somehow that night no one seemed in a humour to enjoy this, or anything else. The men lay under the trees, or in the huts, or lounged about listless and at ease: the women unharnessed the horses, put their gear aside, lifted up the covers and looked into the pots; but all with a certain air of indifference and want of alacrity. Even the very children seemed influenced by the general feeling, and were passing up and down noiseless and depressed. For savage and ignorant as they were, they were human creatures after all, and they knew that they had just committed a barbarous crime, at which all nature revolts.

It was not the fear of consequences; for so successful had they been in perpetrating the murder, and



hiding every trace which could lead to discovery, that there was not one among them who felt the slightest uneasiness upon that account; but they had done a deed of grievous sin and crime; and their consciences perverted, and little awakened as they were, could not be altogether silenced. Wandering in moral darkness as they were, the sense of their crime lay like a heavy nightmare upon the soul: not to be removed, yet neither useful nor regenerating. The old haggard Sarah, who still retained the trace of her once great beauty, sat by one of the fires in gloomy silence, speaking to no one, looking at no one; wrapt in her own thoughts.

Suddenly a figure was seen emerging from among the deep shadows of the trees — a tall, beautiful female figure. Following the path, she soon entered into the full gleam of light which shot upon the grass from a neighbouring fire. It was Hesther. She carried the child in her arms, fast asleep, and, as I told you, his little head resting against her bosom, and the golden curls of his beautiful hair falling scattered over her arm. She crossed the little green, and was about to make her way to her own tent or hut; but to do this, she was obliged to pass close by Sarah, who was sitting with her elbows upon her knees, her two hands thrust into the thick locks of her grizzled hair, looking into the embers. She raised her head as Hesther approached, and seeing who it was, started up, and confronted her fiercely, crying:

“Give me that child.” And she attempted to lay *her hands* upon him.

“*Hold back! hold back!*” cried Hesther. “Touch

him if you dare. Mother Sarah — Queen, if you will — touch the child if you dare!”

“I say,” answered the other, with a scowl of malignity and rage, “I say the child is mine. Was it not I who pulled that wretched Yates from his horse? Was it not I that threw his carrion body into the pool? Was it not I that revenged myself — you — all of us? And is not this wretched little imp of Satan mine too? I tell you, Hesther — I don’t wish to have a quarrel with you, girl — that I’d rather have that child’s heart’s blood than a crown of rubies and gold; for did not his father, Lord what’s his name, sign, with his own right hand, the warrant that made me childless? Ah! and shan’t he know what it is to be childless in his turn!”

And she again attempted to lay hands upon him.

“Keep off! keep off!” cried Hesther. “The boy is mine. He above, the Almighty, has taken my child from my bosom; and I was more than a widow — a babyless mother. Do you know how that feels? Oh no! You lost a son, a big grown man; but did ye ever lose a baby? — a little, soft, boneless innocent baby? Never. You don’t know what it is. And he who took one, has given me another — a baby, more beautiful than the angels of heaven, more precious than all the dark children of the Caloré put together; for his eyes are like blue-bells, and his hair is as gold, and his lips are coral, and his teeth are pearl. So hold fast, hold fast, my treasure and my jewel, and be not scared, and don’t look so daunted with those lovely blue eyes of thine; for she that has thee will keep thee; and they shall tear the heart’s blood from

my body before they have a hair of thy head. Hesther can tell them that. Ha! ha!"

She uttered all this in a loud, mocking, defying tone, as she kept swinging herself round this way and that, whilst the old gipsy made snatches at the child. Then she suddenly darted away to her own tent, and Sarah returned sullenly to her place by the fire.

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The pots, with their smoking contents, are now lifted from the embers, and each one comes with his platter and his wooden spoon. They sit down in a circle, and hands are stretched forth, and each one receives his share. But all passes gloomily — the cloud hangs over them — there is no cheerful sound of animated life, such as usually accompanies their meals — no chatting, no laughing, no appetite. Few can eat, and those who do, eat as if the occupation were a task to be gone through, rather than a pleasure.

Hesther is not among them.

She has shut herself up in her tent — has dropped the canvas door — has lighted a little candle of her own making, and is sitting upon the ground, with the boy upon her lap. He looks in her face, with an asking bewildered eye; but still without shedding a tear. The child seemed, even yet, not to have recovered his recollection sufficiently to weep.

Hesther did not understand this mute sorrow. She was delighted with his tearlessness, as a proof of resolution and courage; qualities in which she, above all, *delighted*. So, as he sat there upon her knee, she

kept gazing upon him with intense admiration, comforting him, and saying:

"That's my brave baby! That's my fine boy! Not a drop — not a drop. They say the children of the Busné are mere milk-sops — all made up of water and hash; but thou art a hero, darling of my soul! Thou art my hero, and my prince!"

And again she pressed him to her heart, and covered him with her kisses.

The child disengaged himself, and looking seriously into her face, said:

"Who are you? I want to go to my mamma."

"Dost thou, jewel of India? Who and what is thy mamma, as thou callest her? No, thou must stay with me — with Hesther. Thou must have no other mamma but Hesther; she will keep thee safe, for the rest would kill thee. Thou must forget thy mamma, and love Hesther. Wilt thou love Hesther, fondling of my heart?"

"Yes, I love you; and you shall go with me to mamma."

And the child's face began to grow troubled, and to darken all over, and tears were gathering to his eyes — those blue eyes, than which, she thought, the tars of heaven were not more beautiful, were beginning to be brimful of tears. She loved the brave child, who wept not; but her whole heart was melted, when his spirit at length gave way.

"Oh! don't cry! don't weep! or you'll break my heart, darling of my soul! — don't! You shall go to

your mamma. To-morrow, Hesther will take you to your mamma — there. You are hungry; here is a bit of sweet cake for my soul of souls; and to-morrow you shall go to your mamma. Sleep to-night on Hesther's bosom: to-morrow you shall go to your mamma."

The child was hungry, exhausted, sleepy, confused. He ate the bit of sweet cake she gave him; and then he was so drowsy, that he soon fell asleep again. And there she sat upon the ground, sawing her body up and down, with him close to her heart, fixing her eyes upon the sleeping features, with such feelings! Suddenly she heard a slight noise at the entrance to the tent: Hesther looked that way. The canvas door was slowly lifted, and a face with two terrible eyes — the eyes of the fiendish old woman — was looking in.

Hesther understood the meaning of those eyes better than any stranger could have done. It was as if she saw their unhallowed influence gleaming upon the baby she held. The curtain was in a short time let down, and the evil eye withdrawn; but Hesther fell into a deep musing.

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"I know her well. I understand that eye as if I was in her black heart, and could read it written with an iron pen upon the rock. The child's life, by fair means or foul, that hag will have! Yes, she will have it: I know her. She will watch by the hour, by the day, by the month, by the year; but this child's life *she will have!* Yes, my soul's treasure! in vain may

either rise up early, and lie down late; watch thee  
 with sleepless eyes by night, with restless, never-  
 ceasing care by day! Sooner or later thy life-blood  
 will have! It is written in her bad, black heart —  
 is to be read in her evil eyes!"

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## CHAPTER XIII.

HESTHER laid the sleeping child upon a wretched flock mattress, in one corner of her cabin, covered him carefully with such blankets as she possessed, and stood a few minutes gazing at him, with looks of the most intense love. With such a look as fables say:

"The mother-ostrich fixes on her young,  
Till that intense affection wakes the breath of life —"

Then she turned away, and left the hut; dropping the canvas over the entrance, and carefully fastening it with a skewer. She made her way to the nearest fire, round which she found, as she expected, the leaders and ancients of the clan in assembled council, with the fierce old woman, who was their acknowledged queen, presiding. Hesther did not join them; but keeping back in the shadow, so as not to be observed, she approached as nearly as she could, and listened to their discourse.

They were, as may be supposed, in deliberation as to what was best to be done. The murder they had perpetrated with so much success, that not a vestige remained, still, that Mr. Yates had disappeared would soon be known all over the country; and though they thought that it would be generally believed that he had perished in the flood, still they could hardly hope *altogether* to escape some suspicion. They were *gipsies*, whose lawless and even murderous habits

re notorious; and they were feared and detested by that country round. Mr. Yates, as was well known, had been very active in bringing the offenders of the law to justice; and it was believed that no gipsy ever felt satisfied in such a case, without revenge. It was therefore the unanimous opinion of the gang, to break their tents that very night, and disappear from that side of the country. This was just settled among the men, when Sarah, who had sat by the fire, listening in gloomy silence to what was passing, suddenly struck with:

"Fine palavering! this danger and that danger; what do any of you mean to do with the little of a Busné? enough to betray us all to the hangman. Besides, the devil's cub can speak — can peach. you think, when the hue and cry's up, they won't kick us out by the child? ay, that will they. Go where ye will, hide where you will, the golden locks of that child will betray you."

"Well, mother, it can't be helped; the child's here, and you would not have us turn him loose," said one; "better hide him among us till this matter is blown over. Only it's a double reason for hiding."

"Hide him! ay, hide him, and welcome!" said the gipsy, with a malignant grin. "Only let me have hiding of him; he'll not be traced in a hurry, I promise you."

"No," said a young and handsome gipsy man, who stood near her; "no — no, mother; I, for one, have had murdering enough for one while. No, no; we won't have the baby butchered."

"You won't, won't you?" repeated Sarah, casting



at him a look of unutterable scorn, mingled with resentment of his interference, and contempt of his humanity. "Nobody asked you to do it, Master Chicken-heart."

"No more chicken-heart than yourself, Mistress; but let's have no more butchering, if you please. I don't like it. I have done nothing but see spirits in the wood-shadows ever since. I declare I wouldn't go back to that water-side by myself — no, that I wouldn't, for all the world! and I used to care for nothing, not I!"

"Strike the tents, and pack up bag and baggage," began the principal man of the party, "and don't stay squabbling here. Come, Mistress, lend a hand, will you?"

But Sarah remained sitting by the fire, mumbling and talking to herself, as she was often in the habit of doing, in a strange, witch-like, mysterious manner.

Hesther crept down upon her knees, then upon her face, and like a serpent, twined herself among the long grass, till she got close behind the old beldame, and could distinguish what she was muttering; and this, she gathered from among the indistinct sentences:

"They may do as they will, talk as they will; but that boy's life I'll have. Did they not rob me of mine? and will I not rob them of theirs! Did he not, that fine young lord, sit as cool there, as if he was penning a love-letter — writing down, what was worse than death to me and mine? Hesther's taken one of her absurd fancies to him; and she thinks — fool that *she is!* — there is strength enough in her right arm to defend him. Perhaps so, against any man in the *squad*, but not against me; no, no, not against me

['ll have his heart's blood, and lave his silver skin with it, as sure as I am of Egypt and a true Caloré. Ha!" suddenly turning round, "what's creeping there? Hesther! you adder!"

"No adder, mother; but Hesther!" said the young woman, suddenly starting up in her true shape, as if touched by the spear of Ithuriel. "Here I am. I've heard what you were saying to yourself; but mind me — and mind me; old, and mother of the clan, as you are, if you dare lift a finger against that child, you shall rue it the longest day you live; if you dare lay a finger on *him*, fingers you will not like shall be laid on *you*. Nay, it's no use spitting fire from your eyes like a wild cat in the dark. I say, and you know me, mother; that child is mine, I love him; and woe to him or to her, who dares harm a hair of his head."

"Yours! I'd be glad to know — yours, indeed! Mine — his — hers — anybody's. How come he to be yours? I'll tell you what, Hesther, we are not going to run all our necks into the hangman's noose, to please you or any one. That child dies this night; and you may bury him yourself, if you please, under that tree; for we are not going to carry him all the world over, as the sign and the signet-mark of what has been done. Make your best of it, or so it is written, and so it shall be."

And as she spoke, she rose slowly from the fire; and with an air of determination, which had something in it of dignity, turned towards Hesther's tent.

But Hesther, uttering a screech like that of a catamountain, *flew upon her*; and in her rage would *well-igh have torn her to pieces*, had not others of the

tribe interfered. They parted the combatants; the old woman suffering herself to be separated from her adversary, and to be persuaded to go to her tent, and prepare for her departure; but as she did so, she cast a sidelong glance at Hesther, which the other but too well understood.

And now all was hurry and movement in the camp. Horses and asses were being caught and brought in from the thickets, and were harnessed to the small rude covered carts which served the company as baggage-waggons. Wild figures of men and women were seen glancing among the trees and huts, now reddened by the glow of the fires; for the moon had gone down, clouds were rising from the horizon, and gathering over the sky: and it was becoming very dark.

Hesther wanted little light in her tent. A candle, made of the pith of rushes, dipped in tallow, served her to collect her small property; her portmanteau being a large iron pot, into which she stowed away, one after another, all her possessions. Having done so, she carried it out to be packed upon one of the carts; and then returned for the child, who lay fast asleep.

Again she looked at the beautiful boy with an admiration approaching to rapture, as there he lay, so lovely in slumber. His cheeks still wetted with tears, but the colour as of the Provence rose. His golden hair, in rich curls, hanging about his face and pretty childish shoulders; one waxen hand under his head, the *little fingers* bare and closely clenched; the other, *holding the blanket*, covered with a curiously-worked *glove*. Hesther stood gazing some time in, as I said

a perfect ecstasy of admiration: then her attention was caught by the glove, the little quaint gauntlet of leather, sewed and lined with blue silk. I know not what impulse possessed her, or what were her intentions, if she had any, or, whether she merely acted from spontaneous admiration of the delicate piece of needle-work; but she lifted the little hand, and gently drew off the glove; and then from her bosom she took a small bag.

The bag had once been embroidered with various gaudy colours in a rich pattern, interwoven with gold threads; but now it was all dirty and discoloured; and the ribbons with which it was drawn, and which had once been white, were become a dingy brown. Such as it was, it was Hesther's best and dearest treasure; for it had been a present from her husband, who had found it in a wood, left there by some forgetful one or other. He had appropriated it without hesitation, and had given it as a love-token to his Hesther.

She put the little glove in, and restored the bag to her bosom; then she gently lifted the child, rolled him in the blankets, and laid him on the ground; whilst she disposed of the bedding in the same way as the rest of her household furniture. Sadly, she lifted the boy in her arms, and carried him forth with a proud, determined air; and leaving her tent to be taken down and disposed of by some of the men, prepared to take her departure.

"Which way?" she asked.

"Right across the mountains, and so up the valleys to Scotland. We shall be in the skirts of Plinlimmon to-morrow, and the night after towards Mow Cop, so *we are diligent.*"

*Castle Aron, I.*

The tribe started forward; and the dingle was soon forsaken, and left in silent darkness.

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The boy, awaking in the morning, found himself in Hesther's arms. She carried him the whole of that day. The little child kept asking for his home and his mother, and Hesther, without the slightest scruple, kept assuring him that to his home, and to his mother, he was going. But, brave as was her spirit, she travelled on sadly; lost in melancholy musings, being convinced of the unchangeable determination of the old gipsy-woman to effect the destruction of this creature, so infinitely precious; and equally convinced that if resolved she was certain sooner or later to succeed; and, moreover, that once resolved was with her to be for ever resolved; for Sarah was never known to change in her purpose, when her object was cruelty or blood.

So they journeyed on, day after day; till, crossing the moorlands of Staffordshire, they plunged into that wilderness of hills and deep valleys, moors, heaths, bogs and crags, springs and streams, which constitute, what by some have been called the English Apennines; and which is one unbroken mountainous district, extending northwards from the moorlands of Staffordshire to the Cheviot.

In one of the deepest and most desolate of the many solitudes which these hills contain, the gipsies *at length* halted. They settled down at no great *distance* from Blackstone Edge, in a narrow, lonely

valley, entirely uninhabited; though at the distance of a few miles, more or less, engines upon all sides were smoking, spinning-jennies whirling, and all Lancashire and Yorkshire at work.

So long as they had continued upon the road, Hesther's apprehensions had been pretty much at rest. Sarah was busied in the occupations incident to the direction of the march, and seemed to take little heed of her or of the boy; but no sooner were they settled in their new encampment, than all her terrors returned. She had not one moment's rest. The cruel eye of the old gipsy seemed for ever upon her, watching an opportunity. The looks she at times would cast upon the child were almost diabolical. Perhaps Hesther felt the more exposed to this persevering malignity, because the place the encampment now occupied was so bare. There was not a tree to be seen; nothing but a barren, heathy valley, shut in by black crags and hills that towered to the sky, and at the foot of which the gipsy huts lay scattered, with the horses and asses browsing round them.

The boy, in the meantime, was, as children invariably do, becoming reconciled to his situation. Hesther was indefatigable in her endeavours to please and amuse him; flattering him with the promise that he should soon rejoin his mamma, till the idea, and with it the wish, seemed gradually dying away in the infant's heart. He became passionately fond of Hesther; and this would have added incalculably, if anything could have added, to her extravagant fondness for him. Once or twice she had been in the most imminent danger of losing him; once she caught him just as he was beginning to devour a cake which Sarah had given

him, and which, as Hesther divined but too well, was poisoned. At other times, the woman, like the Jew's daughter in the old ballad, would be endeavouring to beguile the innocent she had resolved upon sacrificing into her tent, and once Hesther caught Sarah in her own, with her hand actually upon the child's throat.

The young fervid creature, so bold in action, so little used to fear, could ill brook this perpetual anxiety; she became moody, nervous, excited almost to the verge of frenzy. Sometimes she vented herself in paroxysms of rage, calling down the wildest threats and imprecations upon the old woman; at others, silent and gloomy, casting glances towards her, as if she could have killed her.

The catastrophe came at last. Many days had passed in this manner, and still the child lived, and endeared itself more and more to Hesther's heart; but day by day she became more silent and more gloomy, and as if meditating some fell purpose. And so she in truth was. Thus her thoughts ran:

"It is vain; it is nonsense; it is folly. Sooner or later — very soon, perhaps — she will be too sharp for you one way or other; sooner or later she will have thy life's blood, darling of my eyes! I know she will; but — ay, but — she shan't; no, she shan't. One of you two must die, I see it in her face; and which ought it to be? the old hag or the young cherub — she or you — she or me? for die I will when thou diest, my heart's own, and only one. No; it shall never be said that Hesther stood by and saw such a deed done, or that Hesther wanted pluck and heart to *take care of* that she loved as the apple of her eye. *It's a horrid, painful, odious thing to do; but what*

gnifies that? It may be found out, and the whole tribe will hate me — let it — let them. She shan't save you — she shan't, my sweet, sweet innocent!"

This had been the tenour of Hesther's thoughts for many, many days. Alas! for her poor, blinded, ignorant, untutored nature! One night she had left the child asleep in her tent, having gone for some little matter or other, to the hut of one of the tribe. She never left the boy even for a quarter of an hour without uneasiness, and the greatest impatience to get back to him; but she had seen the old woman go into her tent, and believed her to be asleep; so she stayed rather longer than usual, talking with one or two Indians whom she happened to meet on her way back, then suddenly casting her eyes towards her hut, she saw, through the imperfect light of a star-lit but moonless night, a dark figure stealing towards it. She could not have shrieked if she would have given the world for it; an icy terror ran through her veins, and rage and fear rendered her speechless; but quitting her companions, she darted forward, and rushed to her tent.

Through the lifted canvas the inside of the little room was dimly visible. The child was sleeping upon a pallet; over it stooped a dark figure, a hand was laid upon the infant's throat. Did she see it, or did she instinctively divine it? She rushed forward, and tore the arm backwards.

The head was released; the old woman turned away, and with a short laugh of defiance, exclaiming herself from Hesther's grasp, left the scene.

*To fling herself upon her knees by this side, listen-*



ing in an agony of suspense for the child's breathings — to fancy she heard them *not* — then to believe she heard them — to stand up, strike a light, and in anguish indescribable approach the bed, upon which she scarcely dared to look, were all the work of an instant.

The light falls upon the little face. It is blackened; it is struggling; it is convulsed! but, oh! joy, joy! he is not — is not dead! The delicate white throat bore the impress of the cruel gripe which one second more of time would have rendered fatal, but life was not extinct.

She lifted up her baby; she carried him gasping into the air. She sprinkled his face with fresh water from the stream; she held him in her arms. whilst, poor little creature, he struggled in the agonies of returning life — that awful second-birth pang! and, when those convulsions were over, and lulled in her arms and soothed by her crooning, loving voice, the little one had fallen asleep at last, Hesther again laid him down, and casting herself upon the earth by his side, and burying her face in her hands, her courage and fortitude gave way, and she wept long and bitterly. The sufferings which the child had endured in the death-struggle affected her deeply. She sat there till long after midnight, for she could not and would not sleep. She was summoning all her resolution and hardihood for the deed she had resolved to do. This last event seemed to have been the answer to all her doubts and misgivings. No time was to be lost, if the child's life was to be preserved — this night, this *very night* it must be done!

*Poor creature!* there she sat, abandoned to her own

impulses for good or evil, with a conscience seared and perverted, yet not altogether dead, in sad confusion of moral feeling. All that was best and tenderest within her ministering to all that was fiercest and worst; the yearnings of fondest pity, and the most generous feelings of protection for the innocent and the oppressed, mingled with a hatred, the strength and bitterness of which is scarcely conceivable by those tamed and disciplined by early education, and all terminating in a relentless determination, to take the life of a fellow-creature.

By the light which she still kept burning, Hesther looked at her hands, those beautifully-formed, but large, strong, nervous hands; and then she clenched and grasped her fingers together, as if to try their strength. Her teeth were fast set, her eyes distended, her cheeks pale as death, her very lips colourless; and then, she rose from her seat by the child's bedside, took one or two turns up and down, as if to gather and concentrate her resolution, left the hut and made her way to Sarah's.

It was a wild, howling, mournful night. It seemed to her as if evil and unhappy spirits were abroad, and that their voices might be heard in the wailing wind. Clouds were blowing up from the north, and one by one those calm luminous eyes, which looked down from heaven upon her, were being obscured. In the dim light, the dusky forms of the dark mountains which enclosed this little spot on every side seemed threatening her. A mighty power was there, somewhere — a power that summoned her to obey, and that said to her heart: "Thou shalt do no murder." *But Hesther would not hear. She closed her eyes*

and she stopped her ears, that she might neither see nor hear that which might arrest the course she had resolved upon.

Most of us — all of us — have, at moments of our lives, known by experience the temptation of obstinate blindness which now beset this poor creature. God preserve us from it!

The old woman's hut was quite at the other end of the encampment, and Hesther had to pass several of the tents; but this she heeded not: her mind was too highly wrought to care for detection, still less to take any prudential means to avoid it. Every one, however, slumbered: the men, women and children within, the dogs without, the tents. The horses and asses had ceased to browse; all were wrapt in solemn sleep, forgetting the past labours of the day — all but the restless spirit, urged forward to evil by a sort of fatality — evil engendering itself.

The stars looked down in their calm majesty upon the guilty scene, but she looked not up at them; she heard only the fitful wailing of the wind, which moaned in harmony with her feelings, for she was very sad, though resolved; mourning over the execution she thought herself called upon to do. So she traversed the encampment, unseen by any mortal eye; and she came to Sarah's tent, and lifted up the curtain over the entrance. It was so pitchy dark within, that she could distinguish nothing; but she could hear the heavy breathings of one fast asleep. She entered; and her eyes beginning to be accustomed to the obscurity, she could now observe, on one side, an *unformed mass* of blankets, and tattered cloaks and coverings, from whence the sound proceeded. But

the obscurity was such, that she could not at first even discover how the sleeper was placed. Stealthily she crept to the side of what can scarcely be called a bed — not with “Tarquin’s ravishing strides,” but creeping like a cat — like a she-panther. When she got close to it, she could easily trace by the sound which way the head lay. The rest was done she knew not how — she never could remember how! Those few moments of her life were a blank, and remained for ever a blank; they never returned to her memory. The last thing she recollected was kneeling down; stealing her two hands under the blanket, and the feel of a wiry writhing neck. The next was finding herself stretched on the ground by the child’s bed, clasping him wildly in her arms, and covering him with a shower of kisses, as the child suddenly awakened, cried, and resisted.

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The next morning, the old gipsy-woman was not, as usual, among the first to be seen stirring in the encampment. The others took little heed of this for some time; everybody else went about as usual, Hesther among the rest, leading her child by the hand. At last, they began to wonder what had become of the old mother. They were slow to enter her tent, for she was always particularly jealous of intrusion. Some went to the entrance and listened; but they heard nothing stirring: at last, one bolder than the rest, ventured to peep in.

“She’s asleep still,” said he, drawing his head *back again*.

Hesther continued to play with and attend to the child. She sat a little apart upon a heap of stones.

The kettles were set on, the community was soon busily engaged preparing breakfast, and soon the savoury messes were smoking upon their wooden platters. Then Hesther came up, carefully fed her boy, taking not one morsel herself. This done, she went and sat down again in the old place: the little fellow played with some acorns and nuts she had given him; she employed herself in weaving mats of ling, at which she was particularly expert. There was an air of repose upon her face, as of one who, by the execution of some bold and difficult enterprise, has lifted a load of anxiety from the heart, and escaped a pressing danger. She seemed to take little heed of what was going on, and to be lost in her own thoughts.

About two hours after, she was aroused by a sort of cry, and then these words reached her ears, accompanied by a yell of distress: "The old mother is dead!" When she heard this, she rose quietly from her seat, and still holding the child in her hand approached the encampment. The whole tribe were collected, like a swarm of bees, at the door of Sarah's tent. She went up and stood in the outer circle, not endeavouring to make her way through, as many did; but in a sort of suspension of all life and feeling — for so it seemed to her — watching what would come next.

It was a dreadful spectacle that did come next; for *they* carried out the dead body, with its face fearfully *distorted* by the last agony, and as she stood there, *they* brushed close by her, and the body touched her

very clothes. She saw the face distinctly — that horribly distorted face; and the eyes, which stood wide open, seemed to glare upon her — nay, sign to her! She felt very sick, and turned her head away. Nobody, however, observed her: they were all too busy buzzing and bustling about the corpse. Not the slightest suspicion appeared to enter into any one's mind. They believed that the old woman had died in a fit; for she was known to be subject to certain paroxysms, which they attributed to possessions of the Evil One, and in which she would fall to the ground, writhe her limbs, and exhibit the symptoms of epilepsy.

Common sense suggested, that in such a paroxysm she had expired, and the distortion of the features favoured the idea. So they buried her with a gipsy funeral, and without the ceremony, as one may be sure, of an inquest; and when that was done, the tribe, as if taking a dislike to the place, shifted their quarters, and travelled far northwards, even till they crossed the borders of Scotland.

In the wild tract of country which separates the two kingdoms, they remained for a long time; so completely out of the way, that Lady Aylmer's advertisement, and the proffered reward for the discovery of the boy never reached them. Even if it had done so, it is doubtful whether any one among them would have been found daring enough, under the circumstances, to claim it, by giving information; besides, the children of Egypt are true as steel to each other, though so unscrupulous in their dealings with the *Busné*.

*As it happened, however, the temptation did not*

arise; and so the child, the darling treasure of the unfortunate Lord and Lady Aylmer, remained a vagrant changeling among the gipsies, under the care of the high-minded, but violent and guilty woman, who had conceived for him such an unparalleled affection. And what will be his fate? what will he become? the precious one!

To return to Hesther: from the moment the distorted face of her victim had been seen by her, the whole of her inner life was changed. The hideous aspect of her crime thus presented, seemed to have awakened in her a sense of its deformity; from that time this terrible mask was ever present before her eyes, sleeping or waking, toiling or resting, it pursued her; it was the shape taken by remorse. It was only a face; but that distorted face mingled its poison with everything.

She became melancholy, and gloomy, unsociable, ill-tempered, and unamiable, which, in spite of her violence, she had never shown herself before. Bitter in her words, rude in her manners, prompt to take offence, and unrelenting when offended; she was disliked and shunned by her fellows, as a natural consequence, and so became only the more bitter and unsociable. To all alike were these humours shown, the result of an accusing conscience, which, incapable of regenerating, only irritated and fretted the spirit, consuming, as it were, the victim it could not purify. No one escaped the effects of this change except the child.

*This child only appeared to be the more endeared to her, the more her affections were hardened against every other. She loved him with a concentrated depth*

of passion, which is scarcely to be described; her whole life seemed devoted to the endeavour to please him, and make him happy; she toiled unremittingly to procure for him comforts and luxuries which for a child of the Caloré would not be even thought of; and she became more hateful in their eyes on account of this, than perhaps for all the rest. But she set the strictures of her fellows, upon this subject, at defiance. She was strong enough to protect herself and her treasure against the world; and now, added to her former reputation for deeds of prowess, there was something about her, which every one held in a certain dread. The strength of her passion had a kind of sublimity in it. And so she held on her course; and the boy being reared in this way, bid fair to attain a surpassing beauty and strength, and to unite in himself all the finest physical qualities of the two races.

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## CHAPTER XIV.

WE are returned to the wild, moory, hills of Lancashire, to that region of mountains and valleys, that wilderness of barren country which lies beyond Blackstone Edge. Cotton factories are now smoking in various directions, and the long lines of dwellings belonging to the operatives, have spread on all sides; towns of immense extent have sprung up, where, about half a century ago, all was silent as the desert; and these savage tracts are become almost the most populous regions of England. Yet still, in that vast extent of country, large districts are left, unoccupied and unredeemed, of desolate moor, craggy dell and far-stretching chains of fells and mountains; and into one of the most secluded of these fells we are now to go in search of him whose strange history I relate.

It is about three or four years since we lost sight of Claribert, heir of Avon, he was then a beautiful, blooming infant, with large blue eyes and golden curling hair, an object of the wildest attachment to the half-savage heroine who had adopted him. Let us go and look at him now.

There is a black, dreary mountain, frowning over and closing up at one end a long valley so deep and narrow, that only for a few hours in every day can the beams of the sun penetrate into it. On one side, the *face of a rock of dark stone rises precipitously from the glen, seeming to render it quite inaccessible, though now and then, in various fissures of the preci-*

pice, tufts of grass and a few stunted shrubs and some scattered broken heaps of earth, and rubbish overgrown with brambles, afford a perilous footing. A little stream, clear as crystal, but looking black as ink from the nature of the ground over which it flows, wanders among long coarse patches of grass and reeds at the foot of the precipice. Upon the opposite side, the face of the mountain, somewhat less steep is formed of heaps of black, broken stones and earth, almost as difficult of access as the other, so that it is impossible to conceive anything more lonely and secluded than the place appears — more shut out from all communication with the world. And here Hesther has fixed her dwelling.

There is a little rude hut, with walls of rough stone and roofed with sods, standing, sheltered under the rock, close by the side of the stream. The smoke is curling slowly from a chimney or rather hole in the roof, having a few clods round it, and the light blue cloud thence rising is the only object which can be called cheerful amid this dreary waste. The lonely woman is sitting upon a stone by the side of the stream, resting her cheek upon her hand and looking into the water, not as if she was in search of anything, but as if she was so deeply lost in thought, that to her outward sense all was vacancy. Her face is lean and haggard, and there is an expression in it which tells of fierce struggles that have gone on within, as if the soul had been engaged in direct contest with the adversary, but had not, alas! conquered. The traces of intense suffering, of the wildest passion and despair are visible, but not a line which expresses *that the victory over sin and sorrow has been effected.*

She looks gloomy, dark, and deeply melancholy, but neither softened nor repentant. Proud defiance may be read at times in her aspect, as if she knew herself to be guilty and wicked; but guilty and wicked, she repented not, obstinately resisting that conscience whose reproaches she could not escape. Were the crime to do again, she would do it again, and such was, in truth, the state of her mind.

Every feeling with Hesther was intense — whether of joy or sorrow, love or hate, it mattered not. Her mind was reflective, her principles clear, her moral sense almost preternaturally strong; therefore, the voice within spoke loudly and distinctly; and though, perhaps, the command, "Thou shalt do no murder," had never reached her in the injunctions of the Decalogue, yet a command as imperative spoke clearly within her soul; and she knew that to murder was a dreadful crime. But she had hardened herself obstinately against the acknowledgment of that crime.

A dreadful weight! The recollection of it lay upon her soul, but she yielded not under it. She would not humble herself to repent of what she had done. She had committed a guilty deed, and she knew it; she felt the load of sin upon her spirit, but she bore it as a martyr bears the chain that is eating into his flesh — the flames that are searching his very heart — unflinchingly and resolutely.

She looked at the boy, that passion of her soul, and she thought him not too dearly purchased. It seemed to her as if to regret that which had ensured *his safety*, would have been to undervalue him — a sort of offence against his glorious worth and beauty. To *preserve this worth and beauty undiminished* — to

him bright and unsullied, body and soul — to  
at the loveliness she so treasured and worshipped,  
being defiled and degraded by associating with  
rute natures around him — was what had driven  
er into solitude, and separated her from her  
Not that she had left them altogether, indeed  
: she kept up a communication with the party  
ich she had belonged — but she shunned inter-  
e with them as much as she could, and endea-  
d to keep the boy as far as possible from con-  
ation.

er tribe left her very much to herself. There  
something about her that none of them could  
stand. She seemed of another nature, and to  
in a different sphere; and, as concerned the boy,  
in truth, partly shared in Hesther's feelings;  
g upon his rare beauty and sweetness as a sort  
red thing, which even among these rude people  
ced its effect. Strange, but most true, in such  
se circumstances, both had been preserved.  
ower down this valley, you may see the tents  
uts of the gipsies scattered up and down, and  
dogs and their carts, and donkeys, and rough,  
mountain horses, intermingled, grazing upon the  
herbage. The scene is wild, desolate, savage,  
romantic. Hesther sits there, silent and thought-  
oking into the water, and everything around her  
l; but lower down, there is a hubbub of loud  
to be heard, and every now and then, a wild  
or a savage imprecation, mingled with the  
er of the smith, as he labours at his rude anvil  
re voices of women prattling or scolding, and of  
*barking and growling*. Suddenly the noise in-  
*Avon. I.*

creases, and becomes loud and menacing. There is a brawl going on below. Men are quarrelling; and the sound of blows, and the outcries of women, startle Hesther from her reverie. She looks up, and then anxiously round her. Where is he? What has become of him? Ah! he is down there — he is down there among them. "It's of no use — no manner of use: he will be among them, do what I can. Charlie — Charlie."

"Here I am, mammy!" answers a clear voice from the precipice above, where the enterprising child had clambered to a place fearfully abrupt and perilous. "What do you want, mammy? Here I am."

"There! how could you get there, Charlie? You bad boy! What could lead you to scramble up there? You'll break your neck! Come down, come down instantly! — or stay! better stay! and I'll come and help you."

"You can't get up! you can't, mammy! Don't try! don't try! I'm coming down as fast as I can."

"What did you go there for? You naughty, naughty boy! Come down! Oh, you'll break your neck, clambering so! How dare you go without my leave? Naughty, wicked boy! but if I catch you —"

"Mammy! mammy!" looking down from the eminence upon which he had perched himself.

It was a little sandy platform in front of a fissure in the rock, up to which the child had scrambled, it would be difficult to say how, so steep was the precipice; but he was lithe and agile as a squirrel, spirited and fearless. He was afraid of nothing. He would dash into the mountain stream, and dive and swim

ke a young otter, plunging in the deepest and darkest pools, or sporting with the foaming torrent at will. He would scale the most formidable precipices, swinging himself up by the tussocks of grass or roots of reeds, never seeming to know what the sensation of izziness could mean. He would mount to the topmost pinnacle of the highest tree, and there sway about, blythe and fearless as a bird.

In every action that depended upon the perfection of agility, the little boy was, even among the gipsy rhins around him, without a peer. He had, as I said above, the litheness and dexterity of an animal - would glide, and climb, and steal about, and through rough places, where it seemed incredible that a child could go.

Hesther trembled at his daring; for, bold as was her temper, the intensity of her affection made her a very coward as regarded her Charlie; but she triumphed in his successful daring, and gloried in the idea of the triumphs he achieved, over his fellows in feats of this nature.

But when his daring spirit of adventure carried him, as it had done in the present instance, beyond the limits of common safety, Hesther, irritated by her errors, would become enraged beyond measure, and, provided no one was by, would vent her fury outrageously. Before witnesses, however exasperated, though every limb was quivering with agitation and anger, not by one word would she suffer her feelings to find vent. Not only would she suffer no creature on earth to utter a syllable that could offend her feeling, but she had never in any one instance been

overheard to utter even the shadow of a reproof herself.

She looked upon him, it was evident, as a thing too rare, too exquisite, too precious, to be exposed to common handling; and she taught others, by her example, to respect, as she did herself, the divinity she worshipped. When no one was by, however, Hesther would, as we have said, sometimes give way to violent passion. But he, who loved her with that love which casteth out fear, and knew well, by the child's instinct, how passionately he was beloved, would sit, maybe at the top of some pyramidal larch or fir-tree, swinging about upon a branch that threatened every moment to give way, answering her agonizing paroxysms of rage and terror by his joyous shouts of laughter; and then, when it would seem that nature could bear it no longer, and the heart of the strong woman would at last give way in tears, down the tree would he glide, almost as swift as a bird might have stooped from the wing, run to her with open arms, clasp her vehemently round the neck and cover her with kisses.

Oh, then! it is not to be told what emotions swelled in that wild untamed heart. How she would strain him to her bosom, sobbing and laughing and scolding and embracing by turns, and feeling, oh with such an intensity of love! that it mocks all power of description. No doubt these unchastened denizens of the wilds, these children of untutored nature, feel, when they do feel, with a depth that our busied life of circumstance perhaps forbids.

And now Hesther stands at the foot of that fearful face of rock, in fear unspeakable. Nothing can

cure her of such terror when she sees the child in danger, and she is stamping like a fury, as the sweet face of the boy is seen peering over the precipice, smiling like one of those cherub faces which in old pictures you see peeping from among the clouds; looking as beautiful, as innocent, and as heavenly. He was crying out:

"Don't, mammy; don't come up; you will hurt yourself. I'll be down in a moment, mammy."

And she is exclaiming: "You naughty, wicked, bad boy! how *dare* you get up there? Come down this instant, or see if I don't catch you!"

And in no way scared by the passion, or the threat, of which he well knew the impotence, the little fellow scrambles down, while she stands gasping with fear, as she watches the descent. He held something in one hand, which rendered the feat more perilous, but he accomplished it, and laying what he so carefully guarded upon the ground, ran to her as usual, gay and confiding, flung his arms round her neck, almost dragging her to the ground with his vehemence, and kissing her half a hundred times, cried out:

"Naughty mammy! If you go into a passion, I'll eat you."

And then again kiss upon kiss, till he feels himself forgiven.

She sat down upon the grass, exhausted with the violence of her emotions; and he ran to the place where he had deposited his treasure, and returning, reduced a young owlet not yet fledged, which he had captured from the nest.

"There were three of them, mammy. I thought



the mother-owl would never miss one; I want a play-fellow so. See what a queer looking thing it is! with its great big round eyes, and its funny white puff of feathers, looking like the foam in the mill-pool. Mammy will let her boy keep the owl, I want something to play with."

"You don't deserve to keep it. Naughty boy, to frighten me so, and go into such places to fetch it! what do you want with playfellows? There are play-fellows, more than enough, down below."

"They don't play as I like; I don't like playing with boys."

"What do you like to play with then?"

"The clouds, and the winds, to dance with the branches, and play hide and seek with the leaves," was the answer; "but the clouds cannot speak to me," he went on, "and the leaves cannot love me. And I want something to feed, and to put to bed, as you do me; and this darling little owl can fight me, and quarrel with me, as you do; and I can love him, and feed him, and put him to bed as you do me."

"And you'll love him better than me?"

"Oh, no, no!" throwing himself upon her bosom again, "nothing — nothing, as I love my mammy, but I want to have something to be good to, as you are to me, and to mind me."

"As you don't me?"

There was a joyous laugh for answer to this speech.

"Oh! my owl will be a better boy than his master. Won't you, my dear little wiseacre? Look, mammy, doesn't he look wise?"

"You'll love him, and take care of him for two

days," said Hesther; "and then you'll forget to feed him, and he will starve, and he'll die if I don't see to it."

"No, I shan't."

"Yes, you will. All children forget everything— get tired of everything; and you are a child like the rest — but a child like the rest," she kept repeating, as if to assure herself of a fact which she did not in the least believe, for she thought him a shining angel.

"I don't forget," said the boy, fixing upon her his beautiful lustrous eyes — eyes in which heaven itself seemed to dwell. "Don't say I forget, mammy. I don't forget — you are my mammy, and there's the other mammy. No, I don't forget, and never shall forget *her*; but I called her mamma."

"Pooh — pooh! What are you dreaming of?"

"Dreams are when we sleep. We waken from dreams — not to forget is — not like sleep. We waken, and it's always there. I remember that mammy, called mamma — yes, that I do, and how she looked, so different from you — beautiful and white — and with her kind face, and sitting upon her knee; and the glove. Ah! naughty Hesther, you haven't shown me the glove since I don't know when."

"Because you are a naughty boy; and you'll steal the glove, and run away from me."

"I naughty! I steal!" and turning his back upon her, he moved away.

"Don't be naughty now, then. What are you turning your back upon me for? What's the great arm of it after all? Who told you you mustn't steal?"

"Why *you* did — you know you did. You said — I heard you — to Jasper only the other day, when he wanted you to let me go and creep through a hedge, and up a tree, and get the pears. 'No,' you said, 'let the other boys do *that*. My boy was not born to steal.' And now you call me a thief, but I'm not a thief, and I won't, no, nor never will steal. No, not my own — for the glove is my own — but I won't steal it. I'll be dead before I'll steal."

"Well, well, don't go into a passion about it. I don't know you to-day, Charlie!"

"I am growing a bigger boy," was the answer; "and I — Mammy," suddenly interrupting himself, "what *is* Charlie? A Gorgio, a Romanee, or a Caloré? Where did you find Charlie? I heard Jasper and Mrs. Herne talking about me yesterday, as they sat over the fire roasting the eggs they got out of Farmer Robson's poultry-yard. They were talking of me and you."

"And what did they say?"

"They said that you were a fool, or mad, or worse, or bewitched, to make such a to-do about me as you did. If I were the prince of the fairies, they said, it might be something; but I was no fairy, odd as I was, but a mortal woman's child, and *that* you knew, as well as any of them.

"'Why where did she pick him up?' said old Mrs. Herne, 'for sure and certain he's not one of us; and he's got hair and eyes the colour of heaven's blue and of the sunbeams.' She said too — wasn't that *pretty*? — 'So, if he come from fairy-land it's not I *that* should wonder, only you say you know he *don't*.'"

"Well, and what did Jasper say?"

"Jasper said, 'No, no, you needn't ask questions, Mrs. Herne, for it's a story as well kept under the bush. But come from fairy-land, he does not, depend upon that; for his mother was a Christian woman, baptised in a church, though I believe she was about as beautiful as the queen of the fairies herself.'"

The boy paused in his narration, and his childish face took an expression of deep thought — such a look as children are seen at times to assume. At last he lifted up his head, and looking into Hesther's face, who sat there, her eyes rivetted upon him, he said:

"But I think Mrs. Herne's right, and Jasper's wrong; for I do believe that I must have come from fairy-land!"

"And why do you think so?"

"That beautiful lady all in white, with her pink cheeks, and her beautiful white arms; and that used to hold me on her knee, and give me kisses, so soft, so different from your big kisses, mammy! — and walls! walls; — all round gold and blue and scarlet, like the sky in the evening! That must be fairy-land! Oh, its over and over, I've heard old Mrs. Herne talk and tell of fairy-land; and it's not the first time, by many, and many, that I thought I must have come from these!"

"And so you did," said Hesther, abruptly, struck by a new and sudden terror, at the distinctness of the child's recollections, which she had hoped were by this time obliterated. As she awakened to a sense of new danger, her resolution was taken, as usual, at once.

"And so you did. Mrs. Herne was quite right!"

Yes, to be sure; Jasper won't own it, because he's jealous; and he can't bear that my Charlie should be the fairy queen's own fairy prince, and he only a black thief of a gipsy-boy! — but Mrs. Herne's right! Yes; all you remember happened in fairy-land!"

"Shall I ever get back to fairy-land? I want to see that fair lady in white again."

"Oh! I don't know. Who can tell? — who can tell? Yes, when Hesther's dead — yes, when Hesther's dead; but not till Hesther's dead," she added passionately. "No, no, it shan't be till Hesther's dead. She's a black, bad creature is Hesther; and Charlie is a bright angel, fairy prince of light; but he musn't leave Hesther till Hesther's dead! He must shovel Hesther into the grave, and lay the sods over her poor body, with his own dear sweet hand, and then he shall go — then he shall go back — yes, yes, to his fairy-land, and leave these villainous ones here. But if Hesther is accursed — oh Charlie! you must remember who it was for. I see her; she's always there maundering at me, and grinning at me, and nobody knows why. I wish everybody knew why. It wouldn't be so bad if they knew all; but it was for you, child! you, my angel of brightness! all for you! If Hesther's accursed it was all for you."

In this strange, incoherent way she would sometimes burst forth, and the boy would stare at her with wonder, and pity, and love. Yes, these wild outbursts of feeling deeply interested his young heart, and made him love her more and more, with a strange, *mysterious* sort of feeling. Everything, indeed, around *him* was mystery: himself and his recollections the *greatest* of mysteries; and the dark temper of the

being with whom he was so closely connected, and the life he led with her, all was mystery. But greater than these lay everywhere around him, and his young heart was beginning to open to a perception of them. "Where was this beautiful, unseen, but well-remembered, land of the fairies in which he first drew breath? and why and how, had he fallen from it — fallen so deep and so low? And what world was this in which he now found himself?"

The dark barren mountains among which he chiefly wandered with the tribe to which Hesther belonged, were of Hesther's world: that was plain. There was nothing wonderful or mysterious in them. These wide-extended tracts, where chaos still seemed to reign, said nothing to his heart. The rude forms of matter which surrounded him told no tale of that better sphere of being, on which his attention, having been once turned to the subject, dwelt with such intense desire. Yes, that scene which surrounded him was in harmony with, and belonged to, Hesther's world.

But was there nothing more? There were sweet and lovely things to be met with now and then, even here, which seemed to whisper to him of that better world, that land of beauty and goodness, that land of fairy, from which they told him he had been driven. And when such objects were presented, he now began to believe that invisible fingers must have been at work upon them; and that those beautiful beings of which he had heard tell, and of whose existence his memory seemed to recal the faint yet ineffaceable trace, had been busy in creating them.

The brook that ran coursing and sparkling down *between the frowning rocks*, possessed a beauty of this

description; for, as he followed its meanderings from the place where Hesther had fixed her abode, he came to what were to him scenes of unimaginable beauty — where the brook ran clear and transparent as crystal, murmuring among shining pebbles; the silver trout were seen gliding, and lovely water-flowers decked the banks; or sometimes the broken, rocky floor was covered with emerald and golden mosses, whose vivid hues shone through the gilded waters. And the little brook-lime, with its sea-green leaves and tiny blossoms of the brightest blue, the large golden-flowered caltha, which loves the wet places, and giant reeds with brown towering heads, were bordering the stream.

His perception of beauty was so keen that the child found a loveliness inconceivable in everything, and while others passed unheeding by, he was revelling in that exquisite sense of the beautiful which there was scarce an object around him too insignificant to inspire. The very grass that grew in the clefts of the rocks waving its light head to the passing wind, was to him a source of delight. The well-known lines of Wordsworth express to perfection the feelings of such a child:

“ Clouds hang around us in our infancy ! ”

Colours! forms! sounds! — every sense was framed for the most exquisite perception of their charms. The deep blue of the harebell, the soft pink of the lychnis — above all, the rich gold of the yellow broom were his jewels and his treasures! — fairy treasures lavished around him, and treasures none else about him perceived. The rich scent of the hawthorn, or of the *meadow sweet* with its wagging top; and above all, of

wild hedge-rose, were the perfumes of Arabia to  
a, the song of the blackbird or the throistle, delicious  
sic; to which, stretched upon a bank covered with  
sies, whilst the bee hummed at his work, the child  
uld listen for hours. His eye fixed upon the blue  
mer sky above his head, endeavouring to penetrate  
crystal depths, to seek the great problem of being  
of what oppressed him — what he was — whence  
ne? and what portentous meaning lay behind the  
ied screen of nature which surrounded him?

Let not all this be thought incredible. Such spe-  
ations, such questionings, such musings and search-  
s, are not uncommon in very young children of a  
ective turn, especially those who live much in  
nt communion with nature and themselves. The  
at mother reveals herself, as it were, to them upon  
ry side, and in her benignity awakens the soul,  
l calls into being those nobler thoughts and loftier  
irations, which make of the human animal, a man  
say, rather, an angel!

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## CHAPTER XV.

SOME days after, Hesther was again sitting there upon the brink of the stream, watching her little boy, who was playing with and endeavouring to feed his young owlet, with which he was delighted.

She kept her eyes fixed upon him, and was sunk in deep thought. The profound melancholy of her countenance, the darkness that usually clouded her beautiful eyes, appeared to deepen, as thus the wretched woman said to herself:

"You are not worthy. That angel of light and you have no fellowship together. You are a black, wicked demon — a murderous, blood-stained wretch! — and he is as fair and spotless as the white rose in its opening bud. You are as dark as the howling, starless winter's night; and he is as sweet as the breaking May morning! And how dare you, fiend, as you know yourself to be — how dare you call that cherub yours? — how dare you? Look at him now! look at those little legs and feet of his! There — he has stripped off his stockings and shoes, and he is wading in the stream — trying to catch the blue-beetles that are shining in the sun. Look at his little legs and feet, and at his arms and hands! Are they not transparent as the leaves of a flower? — as if they *were made of wax*? — waxen figures, such as I have *seen!* — but a thousand times more beautiful than *waxen figures*, or flowers, or anything else! And look

at your own brown, shrivelled, withered, dried-up hand and arm! Yes, that's you and that's he! You are all scorched up with bad and evil passions; the very heart within you is at best but a burning cinder — one spot of fire in a pitchy night — for all within me is night — and he! he is all made up of brightness! Yes, old Mrs. Herne said well — there's the blue of heaven in his eyes, and the golden sun-ray in his hair! And you dare take that thing — that soft, beautiful thing — in your dry, hard, bony arms, and clasp him to your breast? — to your black, black heart? And who says I shall not?" she exclaimed aloud, breaking off her reverie in a strange way, as she was sometimes wont to do, "who says I shall not? But I *will*! I will have him; I will love him; I will keep him; I will grow to him, fasten him to this heart, bad and black as it may be. Nobody shall take him away — no, no — never, never; not till I'm dead — when Hesther's a corpse; ay, then, then, not till then; no, no, not till then. Mother! queen of the fairies! fair lady in silks and satins! with your soft kisses, and your white hands, and your gentle ways! Yes, you may cry your eyes out; but you shall not have him — no, not you. If *you* bore him, *I* saved him! If you bore the fierce travail-pangs for his sake, I did more. You brought him into the world; and then all anguish was forgotten, for a man child was born, and your agony was turned to joy. But what did Hesther do? what did she do for his sake? She bore an agony, far, far beyond the agony of travail! She bore the agony of crime! the agony of sin! Yes, she crept, in the still night, into the old one's tent, when she was asleep! — *that old mother!* — and she griped her hard. It was

the first time Hesther had done a secret, wicked thing, but she did it for his sake! Oh, horrid, horrid thing, secretly to steal and to kill a sleeping creature, and turn a living soul to cold clay! Oh, the face! the face! the ghastly changed face! Yet she did it! Yes, she did — for him!

“Your agony, fair lady of satins and silks, in your bed of fine linen and down, with curtains of comesoy, was soon over, for your baby-boy was in your arms! Your own — own! your rightful own — own — own! But Hesther’s agony is never over. Hesther’s agony grows greater and greater, worse and worse; for is not that face, that changed, dreadful, horrid face always there? The boy may be in her arms — the living, beautiful boy! but he is not hers; hers he is not. No rightful own — own — own! No blood of hers; no child of hers! And ah! whilst she clasps him to her poor heart — that heart that has burned itself to a cinder for him — he has no blood of hers! he is not of hers! Hesther knows herself to be a wicked thief, that has filched her treasure; but she will *never* let him go! Come here, child. Come, as you are, all dripping out of the water; come and kiss Hesther — a good big kiss! Let me dry your little limbs, all running down with crystal water, against this burning, burning heart. Come to me, Charlie! Come to me — come to Hesther! Come out of the water! Do you hear? Come to me!”

“Mammy! mammy! what do you want?” scrambling out of the brook at her call, his limbs glistening with the streaming water, and looking like an opening rosebud, all bedropped with dew. “Here I am; what do you want?”

"I want you! I want you to come to me, Charlie!" catching him in her arms, and straining him to her bosom. "I want you to call me mammy. I *am* your mammy, ain't I?"

"Yes, you're my mammy — you're my mammy."

"And Charlie loves his mammy?"

"Don't I?" giving her a thousand fond, playful, childish kisses. "Don't I? I love my mammy very much — as much as that — as much as that — and that — as much and more than all the world!"

"But you'll run away from your mammy. They'll tell you to run away from your mammy, and then you'll go."

"No I won't. I'll never, never, leave you, tell me to go who will. But who will tell me that?"

"Mrs. Herne, Jasper, perhaps. The lads — the boys."

"No, they won't; and if they did, I'm not going to go. They may bid, but I won't go. They may 'tice me, but I won't go. No, mammy, I'll stay with you."

"But suppose — suppose, Charlie, somebody came and said they'd take you back to fairy-land, to that fairy queen so white and beautiful; you'd leave your poor, cross, black mammy then?"

"But I wouldn't — I wouldn't!" and his heart swelled, and he began to sob. "What do you say that for, mammy; my poor, black mammy! Yes, you are black, and you're poor, and you're cross, sometimes; but, mammy! mammy! I'd be dead ten times over, before they should take me from you."

"*What! not to go to the white lady?*"

"What do you plague me about the white lady for?" cried the child, impatiently. "I love *you*."

And at such times, Hesther's heart bounded with a joy unutterable; all her jealous pangs subsided, all her remorseful scruples vanished like a dream; and a voice within would exclaim exultingly:

"He's mine! he is mine! He's not hers. Blood is not blood; it's no more than water! He cares not for *her*; he loves *me*!"

And her resolution never to restore him would become stronger than ever. Those moments of joy were, however, but as the fleeting gleams in a stormy sky. No sooner did she see the child again engaged amid the springs and flowers, restored, as it were, to that element of purity and beauty to which he seemed to belong, than the old feelings were revived; to be succeeded by agonies of remorse, if she found him mingling with the gipsies, surrounded by children of his own age, depraved, coarse, and cruel; for then, her excellent, natural understanding represented but too violently the fearful hazards to which she was exposing him, amid the sin and pollution that was there.

Then the crime she was hourly committing, in thus withholding the child from his parents; the cruel injury she was inflicting upon the being she so loved, by the degradation to which she exposed him, would present itself with a painful intensity. Her agonies would be dreadful, but alas! without result. She wrestled fiercely against her convictions; and every struggle with conscience, with that voice of rectitude *which still spoke within*, only ended in a more desperate resolution to keep him in defiance of everything. *The moral dangers to which she thus exposed him*

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were indeed awful. Whether these people, to whom she belonged, were genuine gipsies or not, I cannot exactly say, being too little acquainted with the manners of these tribes of wanderers to decide; but, certainly, a more thoroughly degraded set of half-savage vagabonds could scarcely exist. In the midst of civilised society, they led the life of the most barbarous and unenlightened heathens, yet without possessing those wild virtues which ordinarily belong to the untutored life of nature. They had no high imaginations, no rude feelings of honour, no strong and generous affections among them; they were, for the most part, a set of brutal thieves greedy of gain in any form; prone to the grossest indulgence of their appetites, particularly those of eating and drinking, and addicted to all the petty vices incident to low gambling; they were quarrelsome, covetous, grasping, envious, and malignant.

These evil tempers might be more or less discernible; and, among some individuals, more favoured by accident or nature, faint signs of something higher and better in feeling might be found. But the exceptions were rare; in any case, it was merely a matter of degree. And it was to this mass of corruption, of the very lowest kind, that Hesther was knowingly exposing the lovely child! Knowingly; for she had in her a native sense of superiority, which taught her the fearful wrong she was committing, not only by withholding the child from his parents, but in the daily and hourly evils to which she thus subjected him; do what she would to obviate their ill effect.

*Fearful! fearful trial!*

Can he, can any one, walk unscathed through such a fiery furnace?

Yes, they can; and, more, they *have*.

But, will he?

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If fine natural good dispositions, if an understanding, which even at that early age was remarkable for its clearness and depth, if a sort of intuitive perception of justice, a tender, affectionate heart, and a character that seemed quite *hungry* after good, if these precious gifts of nature can avail unassisted to ward off the evil influences that surround him, the boy will be saved. There can be no doubt that moral dispositions, as well as the gifts of genius and talent, are by no means equally apportioned to individuals upon their mysterious advent into this world. That they should be so, neither experience nor revelation would lead us to expect; all supreme justice requires from man, is to render an account of the portion he has received.

This child was remarkably endowed in this respect. Perhaps it might be his descent, for his father was one of the most excellent of men, perhaps these boons of nature are transcendental and dispensed by a decree and rule above the regular workings of nature's appointed laws. Vain but most interesting speculations.

The child was of a social, joyous nature, in spite of the delicacy of his perceptions, which exposed him *to suffer in a way* his fellows never did, either in his *own person* or in sympathy with those around him; *but in spite of this delicacy, his courage was high, his*

heart gay and joyous, and he loved to mingle with other boys and share their noisy games, especially those which called out bodily force and activity.

In strength he was surpassed by many others of his age, in activity and dexterity he was without a peer. Strength he was not much called upon to exercise. There was little fighting going on among these wild lads, less probably than at our own public schools; their spirit, courage, and love of enterprise, under the rude, half-savage life which they led, evaporated in other ways. And besides this, the beautiful fair-haired child, with his clear sweet voice, his sweet gaiety, his goodness and kindness, and the refinement that hung about him as a sort of radiance, investing all he did, produced the greatest effect upon the imaginations of those around him. These rude but not altogether stupid or brutalized beings, all loved and adored him; their love, indeed, partook almost of the nature of worship. A hand was never lifted against Charlie; had it been needed, ten thousand swords, to use the sentence hyperbolically, ten thousand swords would have leapt from their scabbards to avenge him. In sober prose, twenty or thirty rough brown fists would have been doubled to punish even a look that might have threatened to offend him.

He lived among them, and yet was not of them. Bright gold mixed with, and yet not sullied, by the impure clay. There was that about Charlie with which evil could not mingle, it rolled off as a drop of rain from the leaf of the lily, leaving not a trace behind. But the most remarkable things at present to be observed in *this* embryo moral life which we are describing, were an undeviating love of truth, the strict-



est rectitude with regard to property, and a power of moral reasoning, which elevated him to the rank of a sort of prophet in the midst of this rabble crew.

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Charlie plunged in the brook, and played about and fondled Hesther; and fed and caressed his quaint pet and friend, for some time. At last, a loud burst of merriment, halloos, shouts, and laughter, intermingled, came sounding up the valley. The child pricked his ears, listened, and then flinging down the rushes and flowers with which he was amusing himself, started up, threw his arms round his mammy's neck with a force that almost dragged her to the ground, imparted an impetuous kiss upon her cheek — his custom upon meeting or leaving her — and ran down the strath to the place of the encampment. There was a crowd of gipsy-boys gathered together upon a little grassy plain, formed by the winding stream, and lying between it and the mountains.

A rough-looking group they were; in dirty and tattered garments of all descriptions: mostly barefooted, bare-legged, bare-headed, and bare-armed; some with battered hats, some with old weather-stained caps, but all looking picturesque in their rude attire. All were well-made, lithe, slender, and vigorous in form; mostly with handsome, bronzed faces; large, dark, flashing eyes; and abundance of hair, black as night, hanging *in dishevelled* elf-locks around their animated features. *There was something* in their looks that pleased and *displeased at once*: a spirit and life, but also an ex-

pression of cunning and of slyness, in the turn of the eye, and in certain casts of the face, that was particularly disagreeable, and which contrasted painfully with the freedom of their motions and gestures. You felt disappointed; you seemed to expect that so much vigorous development of limbs and action would be attended by a truthful and generous spirit; but it was not so. They seemed indeed as if it were their business to cheat others, and to be ever upon the watch to prevent being cheated themselves.

At the present moment, however, the nature of the boy, if one may say so, is in full exercise, and that of the gipsy in abeyance: the group, in the highest enjoyment, being engaged in some sport that excited their greatest interest. They are hallooing, shouting, laughing; and the yelping of their dogs, and the loud cries with which they are urging them on, show that their sport is that common sport of boy and man-nature; namely, the chase, or destruction of animal life.

Our little Charlie has run madly down the valley at full speed, and now, panting for breath, his golden hair flying from his face, which is glowing with health, and is the colour of the rose, he pushes his way into the throng, elbowing this way and that, not asking questions, but wanting and wishing to see for himself.

The rocks and stones are falling in confusion down one side of this tiny marsh, being interspersed with little knots of brushwood and brambles. In front of them was a confused crowd of boys and their dogs, curs and mongrels of every degree, with a few terriers and *purely-bred* cockers — how come by may be *guessed*. *All*, boys and dogs, are busily employed in

persecuting a young fox, which a lad standing upon the stones holds captive by a string, long enough to allow the animal to run about and hide and dodge among the bushes.

Poor little Reynard! He is in what may be called in his prime of cubhood — not a little cub, and not a full-grown fox; he retains his charming look of fun, slyness, cleverness, and yet *ingénuité*, to use the French word, which renders his face at that age, perhaps, the most charming one in the animal creation. His beautiful long brush drags upon the ground, as now he runs to this side, now to that; now pauses for a moment, and peeps out from among the stones, brambles, and yellow-broom, as if seeking for help, or hoping for mercy.

The yellow broom flowers topple over his pretty nose, the blue-bells and pink centaury are wagging their heads among the stones around him, and the sun is shining so sweetly and beautifully upon that side of the scene. Upon the other are the savage boys and their cruel and excited dogs; all rushing forward, with loud yells and shouts, to tear the pretty, intelligent being to pieces.

The full force of the contrast struck upon the child's lively and tender imagination at once; and darting from the circle, he rushed forward, crying out:

"Oh, don't! don't! Let him be! let him be!"

But the boys were far too deeply engrossed in their sport to listen to the voice of remonstrance.

A loud laugh greeted Charlie's cry of distress, and "Get out of the way! get out of the way, or you'll be worried, too!"

And at the moment half a dozen dogs, urged by

the voices of their masters, sprang furiously up the bank. The little fox dashed away, and cleared the mountain face before them, for one brief moment he escaped, the next the string pulled him back. The boy who held him in custody shouted with ferocious glee, as the poor little victim fell backward, and the dogs flew upon him.

"Oh, don't! don't! Let him go! Loose the string! Let him go! Oh, they'll tear him to pieces! They *are* tearing him to pieces! Vincent, Sterne, Roberts, let him go! let him go!" the child shouted desperately, scrambling up the rocks, and with reckless valour flinging himself into the very midst of the furious dogs, vainly hoping to snatch the victim from them.

"What are you about? Keep back! keep back! keep back!" one of them shouted from behind him. "They'll be upon him! They'll worry him! They'll tear him to pieces!"

And as if moved by one general impulse, the boys rushed up the steep after their dogs, enchanted by the brave child's intrepidity, and hastening to rescue him from the imminent danger to which he was exposing himself.

It was a scene of the wildest uproar and confusion for a few minutes. Nothing could be distinguished in this crowd of boys and dogs, who were struggling, battling, yelling, shouting, and screaming.

Then in the midst of the tumult the crowd opens a little, and gives way to a wild and beautiful figure, hair streaming, eyes flashing fire; dashing down the steep, holding the rescued creature in his arms.

The dogs pursue him furiously — savagely. The *gipsy-boys*, screeching and screaming, hurry after

shouting to the dogs to keep back, and rushing forwards to save their favourite.

They succeed. At last the storm subsides. Each dog has been brought to reason and obedience to his master's voice; and the hubbub ends in a sort of grumbling, discontented silence upon all sides.

Charlie has seated himself upon a stone on the opposite side of the little plain; he is gasping for breath, but he still holds the fox fast. He keeps his muzzle clasped in his hand, for the ungrateful little beast is making unheard of efforts to bite his deliverer.

The other boys, followed by their dogs, are wandering over the meadow in a slow, lounging, discontented manner — vexed to have their sport spoiled, delighted with the bravery and hardihood of the child, angry that he should have rescued the fox, yet consoled at finding the animal still a captive.

"It's too bad, I declare! What business has he spoiling sport? What a fellow it is! why, the dogs were like lions. There's nothing that lad fears; why should he? What can hurt *him*? he's a fairy child. Fairy child or not, he shall not spoil our sport, and that I'm agoing to tell him, and get my fox back. I'm glad it didn't get off, at all events."

Such were their remarks, as some of them lounged idly up to where Charlie sat, and then one of the boys began:

"Charlie, my fine fellow! how come you to spoil our sport in this fashion?"

"*Because* I thought it a very cruel, and a very *unjust* sport. What had the little fox done? And a

dozen dogs against one! that's mean and cowardly, I think, and unjust too, I call it."

"Here's a fine fellow! justice to a fox! Whoever heard the like of that? What are you going to preach about next, Master Methodist? last time it was a cock we mustn't throw at; something in that, there might be, inasmuch as chanticleer never hurt any one but hisself. But now it's a fox! Well, I suppose if a roaring lion came amongst us, we mustn't touch him."

"It's not a roaring lion; and if it were, he ought to have justice," said Charlie, hugging the fox closer to his breast, who had now ceased to struggle, and sat there, his sharp eyes fixed upon the speakers, as if listening to what could be urged against or for his defence. "If he *were* a lion, he ought to have fair play."

"Fair play! you're always talking of justice and fair play, as if anybody cared for fair play."

"I care for it, and you care for it; and we all care for it!" cried Charlie, with enthusiasm. "Gipsy lads you are, all; but that's no reason. You know what fair play is, and why shouldn't you do it, by beast or nan, one and all, for that's what I call noble and rue."

"Where did he get all his big words, I wonder?"

"Oh! the fairies come and tell him them in his dreams. Ain't it so Charlie? Where do you get all your grand notions, little lad?"

"Come, give me the fox," said the boy who owned the animal, "and let's have done with it; and I'll forgive you for spoiling sport. Keep down, Badger," to his dog. "Yes, twelve to one *was* unfair odds, I'll *won so much, any how.*"

And he came forward to take possession of the fox, but Charlie held back and squeezed the creature the tighter.

"It ain't yours! Give him to me — do you hear?" said the boy, angrily.

"No, it ain't mine — I know it ain't mine — but it's not yours, perhaps, either. How did you get it?"

"What business is it of yours, how I got it. Give it to me — give it to me, I say. Do you hear? I'll give you a good 'un upon the head, else."

"What are you going to do with him?"

"Do with him? what I like."

"And what will you like; worry him, and torment him, and be cruel to him?"

"Worry him, to be sure. What is a fox good for, but to make fun of?"

"Then you shan't have it, to make fun of," and turning suddenly round, he was about to set the animal at liberty; but the thought flashed across his mind that then all the dogs would be upon him in a moment, so he held him fast, and said:

"Only look at his funny, clever face, and his eyes! Why he looks as if he was smiling. Don't worry him, Ben; make a pet of him. If you'd give him me, I'd make a pet of him. It's not like a man to worry a poor little dumb creature like this."

"Not like a man!" said Ben, contemptuously, "why what do men do — don't they badger-bait, and bull-bait, and bear-bait, and fight in the ring, and —"

"Well, it's not like what I call a man, if they do."

"And what are beasts made for, if we mayn't make sport out of them?"

"I don't know what they're made for; but this I know, I wouldn't, if I were a big boy, hurt a poor little dumb animal — no, not for all the world. So don't, Ben; let this little fox alone, and —"

We shall be tired of this childish pleading, to which I feel that I am not doing justice. This time, indeed, Charlie did not probably speak with his usual eloquence, for Ben was not to be persuaded. In the meantime, the other boys, tired of the moral argument, had taken themselves away, they and their dogs, in pursuit of some other diversion; and the two boys were left alone, so intent upon what they were saying, that they did not for some time perceive it. At last, Charlie, looking round, spied his advantage and turning his bright blue eyes sparkling with triumph upon great, heavy, big Ben, he said, abruptly breaking off the colloquy:

"Now promise me you will not let him be worried again, or —"

"Or what will you do? for I won't promise you anything; but this I'll do, I'll set the dogs upon him the moment I gets him to myself, see if I don't — and that because you plague me so about him."

"You will, will you? Say that again."

"I will — that I will, and I'll swear to it if you like."

"Then this is what *I* shall do," cried the child, exultingly; and opening his arms wide, he released the fox, who speeded like lightning across the grass, and was out of sight among the rocks in a moment.

Big Ben turned pale with anger.

"And this is what I'll do — *now* —" doubling his ponderous fist with a gesture as if with one



blow he would annihilate the delicate being before him.

"No, you won't — no, you won't!" the child repeated, calm and unflinching, not even moving himself on one side to avoid the blow, but confronting the young ruffian with a serene eye and unblenching cheek. "No, Big Ben, you won't hurt *me* because I took the part of the unfortunate."

"I could find it in my heart to kill you," muttered Big Ben, dropping his hand and turning away sulkily.

"Oh, you're a great, big, rough fellow," cried Charlie, springing after him, and twining his arm round that of the young Hercules. "Oh, you're a great, big, rough fellow! — but if your wrath is like a lion, ain't you generous as a lion? — generous to a little lad like me, as the lion was to the little dog, Big Ben, ain't you? — ain't you? And, now, you won't be sorry a poor beast is got safe and happy home?"

"You've such a way with you," said the strong one, stooping down, and with his great, rough hand caressing the little boy's head and its golden, silky curls, "you've such a way! Generous! that's one of your words. Do you think the brute of a Big Ben *can* be generous?"

"He is — why shouldn't he? — Why shouldn't he be a noble, brave fellow, such as I want him to be? — one who wouldn't hurt a fly, yet would fly at a lion. That's what Big Ben ought to be; that's what he will be."

"I don't know for that; perhaps he might if he *had* a little fellow like you always at his elbow, &c

re up the good in him, if there is any good. ts main little there is of that same, I'm afraid; when you're gone back to Hesther, I'll be as bad as ever. Why does she keep so lonesome and f the way? However, I *am* glad the poor beast 't worried, after all."

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## CHAPTER XVI.

THE simple event above related, laid the foundation of much which seriously influenced the boy's after life. In the first place, it was the beginning of a close friendship between Big Ben and Little Charlie — a friendship which Hesther, in spite of the cruel torments of her jealousy, could not witness without a certain satisfaction.

Big Ben was the Milo, the Hercules, the strong man among these rude gipsy-boys, and Hesther, who could not help trembling for the very existence of the precious and delicate being exposed to the rude contact of these hard and savage natures, looked upon the protection he was now certain to obtain as an assurance of her darling's safety.

She therefore stifled the envious pangs she felt, and looked on with patience when she saw Charlie happy and excited, playing round the great rough boy like some delicate spaniel about a big water-dog; or sitting by him upon the grass, on the side of the coursing brook, his little arm locked in the huge one of his companion, prattling away, lifting up his blue intelligent eyes, and fixing them upon the face of his half-sultry, half-pleased friend. In truth the child had already begun to exercise over Big Ben the same strange fascination which he possessed over Hesther; and, as *the wild affections* of the one were rivetted upon him *with a measureless intensity*, so over that heap of

heavy clay — this great animal of a boy — the voice, the eye, the winning manners of a creature so different, possessed a strange power. In the heart that lay hidden within the bosom of that rude unformed Colossus, there were stirrings of life; faint throbs of emotion they were at first, but gradually they strengthened; faint beams of light, too, broke amid the darkness of the intellect, casting gleams and shadows, and revealing forms till then quite obscured and unperceived. The voice, that voice which first awakened chaos, and called forth harmony and beauty from the dull elements, was breathing upon the uncouth mass. That precious voice now found utterance through the eyes, in the sweet lively tones, and the engaging loveliness of this good and innocent child; and a spirit was awakened within that wild untutored gipsy bosom, a perception, faint though it might be, of new and better things — of goodness and of beauty.

The first action of little Charlie after the release of the fox had been one of great moral loveliness, displaying at once his sense of justice, his admiration of what was right, and his own generous spirit of self-sacrifice. Struck with the conduct of the once harsh and too often cruel boy, the child after he had parted from Big Ben, retraced his steps up the glen in deep meditation.

His thoughts had taken another turn, and the fox being no longer the object of compassion and interest, his attention was turned to his late master. He began to think of the loss Big Ben had sustained, and to measure, by the intensity of delight it would have afforded himself to possess such a favourite, the extent of the sacrifice to another.

He began to doubt whether if he had restored the little sagacious rogue to Big Ben, he would not have done what was more right and good-natured, than in thus letting him go. The child's conscience was puzzled between his humanity and the affectionate esteem he began to entertain for his companion.


"I wonder whether Ben is very sorry — as sorry as I should be if they took my little howlet away — my dear little howlet, — perhaps he is."

So he went on thinking, and pitying, and dissatisfied with himself, because he could make no compensation to Big Ben. All at once a thought struck him, and he stood still as if thunder-struck.

Oh yes! that would do — that would compensate to Big Ben. But should he? could he? Could he bear to part with it? — his queer little howlet, which he intended so to love and play with; the friend and companion of his solitude, and the object of so much adoration to his warm untutored heart. Should he? Yes! yes! he would — that he would; and he started towards home as fast as he could.

First thoughts are best when they are generous; second thoughts are but too usually those of prudential calculation. First thoughts are of the heart; second thoughts of the head. He seemed afraid to trust himself with reflection; he hurried rapidly on.

Hesther was still sitting upon the stone, leaning her back against the solitary tree. She was looking down the glen, watching impatiently for his return. He never left her but she was in terror for his safety — a vague sort of terror, for which she did not attempt to account, and to which she yielded without resistance, just as she did to every other feeling, good



or bad, as it arose. She was never easy when he was long away, because she lived but in his presence, and also she was in continual dread that something might arise to part them.

She had remained there restless and impatient for some time, and was just about to rise and walk down the glen to look after her Charlie, when she saw him coming flying towards her. She opened her arms, as she was wont to do, to receive him, but instead of flinging himself as usual upon her breast, he passed her, and hurried to the place where he had built himself a kind of cage to hold his little owl.

"What are you going there for? I thought how it would be," she began angrily; "you can't think of Hesther now. You've no eyes but for your howlet. I wish with all my heart it was drowned in the stream. I've a good mind to wring its neck, haven't I? Ever since you've had it, you've loved it better than me.

"See how he's hugging it!" she went on half aloud to herself. "Did you ever see anything like that child? Why, he's crying over it, I declare! What a heart of love it is," she added with a sigh; then more loudly, and with increased irritation, she went on, "Pretty fellow, you are, crying for joy, to see that nasty beast again, and not a word for Hesther! — not a word for Hesther, and you away, I don't know how long."

The child's heart had been too full for him to pay attention to anything; he neither heard nor saw any object, but that upon which his whole soul was intent; but these reproaches reached him, and turning to her, with his eyes swimming full of tears, he said:

"But, mammy, I do love him so."

"*I know you do — a little foolish beast!* Well,

well, children must — but let him alone now. What are you going to do with him? Can't you come and have your supper? Why can't you let him alone?"

"Oh, mammy, mammy! Oh, my little howlet! my little howlet!"

"Well, what a fuss you are making about your little howlet. Of all the days in the year, why make such a to-do about him just now?"

"Because — because I'm going to part with him."

"Part with him! What's in the child? Nonsense, your little howlet! No, no! If it's because you think I'm jealous of him, and hate him — why so perhaps I may be, and so perhaps I do. But I'm a bad creature, Charlie; Hesther's jealous of everything. Never mind her; don't heed it! Part with your little howlet that you loved so! and all to ease poor Hesther's heart! No, that you shan't. You *are* a darling to think of it. But don't think of it again. Part with it!" she kept repeating, her heart quite melted. "No, that you never shall do for me!"

"It's not for you, mammy; though I'd give it you *first* if you liked it; but you don't like it; it's for Big Ben."

"Big Ben! And how come *you* to be so thick with Big Ben? I doubt whether he's a proper companion for you, my own jewel, for he's a bad boy."

"Oh! he's not a bad boy; but a good, generous boy. Only hear, mammy."

And then, still holding the bird fondly in his arms, he came to her knee, and with great fervour, his eyes *sparkling* and his bosom heaving, related the history of the fox, concluding with:

"And so I will give him my howlet. It is all I have in the world, and I'll give him my howlet."

There was a strange light in Hesther's eye, a passionate admiration of moral worth — that passion which, so long as it continues to exist, seems to redeem the darkest nature.

"And you'll give it him?"

"Yes, I will — I will. But I must go now, mammy; don't keep me now. If I don't do it at once, I can't do it."

"Go, go!" said she.

And the child turned away and went upon his generous errand.

"Big Ben," he said, as he went up to that hero, who now indolent and moody as some heroes in repose are apt to be, was sitting upon a tussock of grass, plucking idly the herbs which grew around him, and sunk, apparently, in no very agreeable reflections. He was indeed thoroughly out of sorts, for he felt *ennuyé* and dull, that most insupportable affliction to people of his class of life, who but rarely exposed to feel it, endure it when they must, with peculiar impatience. "Big Ben! What are you doing, Big Ben?"

"Doing! What should I be doing, who have nothing to do? Thinking what a fool I was to let you have that fox, and turn him out so. I should have been playing and amusing myself if I had the little fellow now. I'll tell you what," he added, getting up in great ill-humour, "I didn't serve you out for it then; but I've a good mind —"

"It's not because I'm afraid you will serve me out," said the little Charlie, "for I'm sure you won't; but it's because I, who never had a pet before, know



how sorry you must be to lose yours: so I have brought you mine, which I hope you'll please to take, and love it, and be as happy with it as I used to be."

"You're not going to give me that howlet!" said Ben, opening wide his big, black eyes.

"But I am; and you're welcome to it! You'll like it very much! It's so droll and pretty; and, perhaps — perhaps, Big Ben, when you've got it, you'll let me come now and then to look at it, and feed it?"

"You're not a going to give this ere howlet to me!" Ben repeated, still keeping his eyes wide open with amazement.

"Yes; pray take it! — to make you amends. Here, this is the way to hold it. Don't hurt it, Ben, with your big hands — poor little thing!"

"I hurt it! I touch it! I take it! I'll be d—d first! I take your howlet from you!" cried Ben, his huge chest heaving with emotion, and an odd moisture coming into his eyes. "I take it! Well, but you are a good little fellow, to come now and bring your only treasure, the thing you love best in all the world, and offer it to me! Why, there's a something in it, Charlie, I don't know what, but it seems — And hang me, if ever I'll let boy or man plague you or contradict you again; never believe Big Ben else! No, no; take your pretty, funny bird back again, and love me a bit, that's all!"

And in this simple manner the friendship between these two apparently incongruous beings began.

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So soon as Hesther learned how Big Ben had received her little boy's offer, she was delighted with him; she thought nothing too good for him; treated him with the greatest cordiality, and could even resign her Charlie to him for hours, so grateful was she that her child's feelings had been spared, and he made happy again.

This friendship produced permanent effects. Under the protection of Big Ben, Charlie was inclined, and Hesther suffered him, to visit the encampment much more frequently than he had been before accustomed to do, and to associate more with the other gipsy-boys.

The moral contagion to which she thus exposed him, she thought less of; satisfied that he was quite safe, so far as personal security was concerned, under the care of his doughty friend; for she was herself becoming more and more gloomy and melancholy, more than ever addicted to solitude, and indifferent to everything. The crime she had committed seemed to hang like a heavy weight upon her conscience; a fearful darkness pervaded her soul, in which she groped with a dim perception, almost ignorant of the extent of the sin, the remembrance of which pressed so heavily upon her heart. Incapable of that repentance which would have been to her a renewing, and a regeneration, her remorse seemed to be devouring her by inches, without producing any real change or improvement. Every day she became more self-absorbed and more morose, till the voice, even of the charmer, seemed to have lost its power. The intense interest she had felt in the moral welfare of her little boy *seemed to be changing* into indifference and apathy. *She loved to indulge her morbid melancholy in soli-*

tude, and left him to take his chance. A fearful chance it was! among those uncultivated and vicious barbarians. But she seemed content now, contented so that he came back to her at night, and she saw him safe and sound.

This was a fearful change for the worse, as regarded him. And now the tide of evil began to set in strong. Evil companions surrounded him on every side; all the vices to which that form of savage life is prone — a life not carried on in the wild freedom of nature, but exposed to the corruptions of civilised society, without its attendant antidotes — flowing round like a flood.

What will become of him? Is it possible that he can escape? Can beneficent nature, however rich and lavish her endowments, suffice to shield him from the mass of bad which besets him in every form, and upon every side?

But we must leave him, and return to his mother and Hernana.

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## CHAPTER XVII.

A CHARMING creature, was Hernana, as I have said. So thought her father, so thought Lady Aylmer, so thought Philip Gorhambury.

The life Mr. Lovel, Lady Aylmer, and Hernana led, continued much such as I have described. Mr. Lovel wore the same shabby hats and coats, in spite of all his daughter could do; and would not, even to gratify Lady Aylmer, be persuaded to lay out one shilling upon himself, unless in matters of indispensable necessity. And, as he had a contempt of appearances, which amounted almost to a fault — and was, indeed, the only fault that could be discovered in him — this indispensable necessity had often been long evident to her people, before he could be persuaded to acknowledge it himself.

Hernana and Lady Aylmer had recourse to numberless little feminine contrivances to remedy the disorder of his toilette. Sometimes a coat or waistcoat were surreptitiously introduced; sometimes the battered one disappeared, and a spruce beaver was found upon the peg in its stead. The coat or waistcoat was usually put on without observation; probably the change was perceived. The new beaver could not so easily escape; he would take it down from its peg, sweep it with his coat sleeve, turn it round, fit it upon his head, look rather discomposed and discomfited in it, *arch about* for his old favourite, but that not being

to be found, would at last go forth with the stranger upon his head, looking so half-rueful, half-ashamed, that Hernana could not help laughing.

The whole time of this good man was spent in the indefatigable discharge of his professional duties. The city of G — was large, and had been long greatly neglected, both by its clergy and its municipality. Mr. Gorhambury's parish was a very extensive one, and comprehended some of the very worst quarters of the place. The sum of crime and misery, of ignorance, vice, disease, and sorrow, of ill-conduct, mistaken views, barbarity, darkness, and perversion, accumulating under such circumstances, is immense. One only effectual remedy has as yet been found, or according to my persuasion, ever will be found to this array of evils; namely, the efficient preaching of the Gospel. Other blessings will follow, I am persuaded, as a matter of course. But it is vain to attempt permanently to improve the condition of the poor by any other means.

All your lecturings and teachings, and cultivations of the intellect, and taste for the beautiful; even your thrice and ever blessed, and to be praised sanitary reforms, will prove vain, so long as man is but as the beasts which perish, without accountability, and without a future. With these, be his condition what it may, he is still a man; a noble, exalted, spiritual being, lifted above himself by communion with the All-wise, and All-good. Deprived of these, be he in a palace, or a dungeon; ruling an empire, or grinding *at the mill*; his is a poor, futile, maimed, mutilated *existence*, robbed of its true distinction — the *Infinite*.

"Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die!"

the oyster may exchange the sentiment with the . Incessantly did Mr. Lovel labour at this great his days were spent among the dwellings of the , and wretched, and darkened creatures. There so many; such numbers upon numbers; such hosts hosts. It was as if one would exterminate the flies mists of plagued Egypt. But he laboured per- ngly and unremittingly, nevertheless. Oh! he not that one of these little ones should perish. countless were the souls he saved; or, if this he ht too presuming an expression, countless were ouls he restored to a better life, and to a higher y; countless the death-beds of poor, weak, ble sufferers, that he elevated, and consoled by ea of the divine sympathy; countless the sinners having first humbled, he brought into submission e Divine Master; countless the drunkards that e good any happy fathers of families; countless latterns and the scolds, who exchanged their id indolence and their peevish irritability, for in- r, cheerfulness, and contentment. Long, long, rked, an ill-requited and obscure labourer; but vour of these labours mounted on high. e great ones of this city, at last, began to per- that a good agency was at work. The obscure e became an object of attention. His advice was , his suggestions attended to, means were hed for more extended good. This was his re- ense here, a high and delightful recompense. he saw sewers cleansed, and habitations re- the blessed light of heaven, the blessed breath

of heaven, and above all, the living springs of pure God-given water pouring where all had been darkness, filth, and disease, he *was* repaid. Did he care for hats and coats whilst he was doing this? Too little, perhaps. But his Hernana and his Louisa cared for *one*, who cared for every one on earth but himself.

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Economy, however, was the order of the day with them all. Lady Aylmer's desolated heart found its best consolation, childless widow as she was, in administering to the wants of the wretched. She made herself children of the children of misery. She did not, it is true, carry her charitable penuriousness quite so far as Mr. Lovel. A certain elegance and beauty in the life which surrounded her seemed indispensable to her well-being, necessary to maintain in her that serenity of spirit which is required for all successful labour; but the luxuries, the superfluities, and above all, the ostentations of life, she despised and defied.

Hernana loved order, and beauty too; but she loved generosity, and a Spartan contempt of ease and luxury still better. She profited by, and preserved, a happy medium between the sacred indifference of her father and the perhaps too sensitive dependance of Lady Aylmer upon externals.

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Now I think it is time to make you acquainted with Philip Gorhambury.

Mr. Gorhambury, in secret — a very dissatisfied and unhappy man, took up his abode at the Castle, where he continued to live with the exception of those portions of the year when he was in residence. He was a prebendary of the cathedral, as well as rector of the largest living in the city of G—. Uneasy and irritable, he seemed to be under the influence of some maledictory bann, yet everything he touched appeared to turn to gold. He, therefore, became exorbitantly rich; but, as too often happens in such circumstances, all seemed to become blank, tasteless, and onerous, till even the grass-hopper was a burden.

What a priceless treasure is a rich, large, loving heart! What dire penury lies in a cold, unsympathising, selfish temper. What are your heaps of gold to such a one? They are apples of Sodom, indeed! Mr. Gorhambury knew that he had been guilty of a very base, dishonourable action — a crime, as regarded the will — a false deceit, as related to the proofs offered of the child's death; and therefore, before the tribunal of his own conscience, he stood a miserable, degraded caitiff. He felt, and he looked as he felt, that he was in spite of all his external wealth and show, a miserable, degraded being. But worse for him, even than this, his heart was utterly shrivelled up. One has heard of such hearts, no larger than a hazel-nut — incapable of expansion, as of warmth — of the generous glow, as of the generous swell. What can life offer to such? what can wealth do for *them*?



He was become incapable even of feeling pity. He was so miserable himself that he envied everybody. The very beggar who begged an alms at his gate he envied. His was naturally an envious nature; and to the envious all sympathy with his fellows is denied, except with those more unhappy than himself.

And who more wretched than Mr. Gorhambury? No one.

He could take no pleasure in relieving those, with whom he would almost have changed places. To increase happiness affords no joy to the envious man. That large field of delight open to the wealthy is denied to him.

Mrs. Gorhambury was not a person to call forth higher and better aspirations. She was an excessively talented, superior woman. Genius she had not, but everything else, to an extraordinary degree — ingenuity, talent, cleverness, industry indefatigable.

Her paintings, her sculpture, her carvings in wood — even her very needlework, when upon that she condescended to employ herself — all alike exceeded anything ever produced by amateurs before. She had, likewise, a very extensive knowledge of languages; and, for a woman, very considerable erudition as a musician, in which, whether as a composer or performer, she was most remarkable.

Such accomplishments commanded the admiration of everybody, and were a source of great pride and satisfaction to her husband; but they were *too much*. All life seemed absorbed by them. There were no *spare moments* for sympathy and confidence; none of those dear and tender dawdling fireside hours, which

use heart in heart. Even had Mr. Gorhambury's heart been capable of such fusion, the occasion never presented itself. Mrs. Gorhambury was absorbed in art, and in art he took not the slightest interest.

The accession of fortune which had proved so barren and unprofitable a gift to him, had to her become a source of great enjoyment. The abundant means thus furnished for the cultivation of her talents, the power it gave of commanding the society of all the most eminent in the several circles of the arts, were enjoyed to their full extent. She improved rapidly, wonderfully; her productions in every way fully merited the admiration they were sure to receive. But what was all this to the dreary spirit of her husband? loathing, as he did in his diseased frame of mind, the very sight of the objects upon which so much pains and time had been expended.

One pleasant chat — one tender inquiry — even one melancholy murmur of discontent — one good hearty falling out, would have been something — a communion, a relief.

And how was it as regarded the only son of this all-accomplished woman?

The mother exercises an influence incalculable upon the son. The mother may almost be called the destiny of the son.

Upon Philip Gorhambury, the effect of his mother's character and pursuits was great, and the character of the results very dubious.

He inherited much of her delicate perception and *fine taste*; her talents seemed to descend to him. He

drew extremely well, and his love for music amounted to a passion.

From a mere schoolboy he had been celebrated for his performance upon the only instrument he then cultivated — his own matchless power of musical whistling; but, as he grew up to manhood, he chose others, and became with little pains a first-rate performer upon the violoncello.

His mother delighted in those talents, and encouraged them by every means in her power. By her example the young man was taught to love poetry rather than wisdom — beauty than usefulness — art than politics. The cultivation and worship of beauty was his religion, as it was hers. Even the Almighty God above us was to be worshipped in His “revelation as the Beautiful.”

Such habits of thought enfeeble and imperceptibly degrade the mind. It is a pagan worship after all. The sublime — the pure — the light of lights is not there.

Philip grew up elegant, refined, full of delicacy, accomplishment, and outward attraction; but susceptible, self-indulgent, with no bold, generous, or manly aspirations after the higher good as regarded himself, and still less as regarded others.

How different from Hernana — the very contrast to Hernana! Was it for this reason that they loved each other? Upon her side, perhaps. She had few opportunities for comparison. Philip in talents, accomplishments, elegance of appearance, and, above *all, in a peculiar sweetness and delusive tenderness of manner, far surpassed everything she had ever seen,*

or even imagined. She admired him, loved him, worshipped him.

But this admiration and idolatry was the secret of her heart. She had not revealed it even to her friend and second mother, Lady Aylmer; no, nor to her father. There was something in the manner of both when speaking of Philip Gorhambury, which chilled her and forbade confidence. She felt persuaded that they did him the greatest injustice; and had for some reason or other taken a prejudice against him; but her consciousness forbade her endeavouring to overcome this prejudice. She said nothing, and her secret was not in the least suspected.

Philip upon his side, had liked Hernana from a child. There was something in the energy and sublimity of her character — her frank and faithful truthfulness, so different from himself, and yet which he loved beyond words, as boys and men of somewhat feeble characters are prone to love the girl or woman upon whom they can lean.

As she grew up, her fine, classical form, her open-spirited, intellectual countenance, called forth his highest admiration. Inferior to him as she was in her social position, he took the greatest pride in her — he never saw her without a feeling of elation. She was such a noble creature! Once or twice he had spoken of her before his mother, and his mother would acknowledge that the form of Hernana was perfect enough to rival the antique models; but then he would add a few words of contemptuous pity for the narrow education she had received, her deficiency in accomplishments, her ignorance of art, and the

*Castle Avon. I.*

oddity and narrowness of Lady Aylmer's ideas — she too who had pretended to form her.

"Really, it is a pity," she said upon one of these occasions, "for Mr. Lovel, though he is only your father's curate, was born a gentleman, I understand, but Hernana is more fit to be a housekeeper than a gentleman's wife. She is not even accomplished enough to take the place of an ordinary governess. Mr. Lovel is very poor, I believe, but what could Lady Aylmer be thinking of! However, she is an odd, obstinate sort of woman — I know that from your father. But, good heavens! Philip, what are you about? Why you are painting your sky apple-green!"

"I took the wrong colour. Somebody has jumbled all the colours together. Everything is topsy-turvy — what a fool!" And he tore the picture he was beginning from the easel, and was about to cast it into the fire.

"Dear Philip, what are you about?" said his mother, "you can easily obliterate your mistake — see! It is done already," added she, passing her experienced brush over the apple-green sky. "This is a beautiful beginning — there the light a little too much broken, perhaps; but really it does you infinite credit upon the whole — your perception of art —"

"Art be d — d!" said he roughly, "I am sick of art and of everything."

His mother stared.

"What can you be thinking of?"

"Sick of it all — of everything! Sometimes, mother, I ask myself what is the use of all this? What purpose in life does it serve, making pretty pictures

to hang upon walls, which not one in a hundred looks at, not one in five hundred understands, and not one in ten thousand cares for? It's all very pretty — very pretty; but, oh! how cursed tired of life I sometimes am!"

"That distaste of life," said his mother, quietly, "is the scourge of genius. Who has not felt it, in their moments of discouragement and anxiety? All feel it. There is no escaping from it. But beauty is not the less beautiful because there are moments when our very sense and perception of it seems dead. The immortal works of Grecian art remain for ever — the endowment and admiration of the universe; though —"

"Though what?" said he, impatiently. "Mother, it's a great humbug, after all. Who is the better for the Apollo or the Laocoon?"

"Nay, if you talk so absurdly as *that*," said she, resuming her pencil, "I can have nothing to say to you."

Of course he believed, as everybody else feels bound to believe, that he was very absurd when he ventured to propound such ideas — ideas, however false, which will present themselves, when life in its intensity presses upon us.

"Well, mother, I beg your pardon for speaking evil of your gods. It's all my own stupidity and ill-humour. But, oh! this Castle! this Castle! it is to me, at times, the very cave of spleen — the den of the demon of ennui. There are moments," said he, looking round the room with an air of indescribable disgust, "when I could take up all these fine things, and make a bonfire of them. That would warm one, at least, for once in one's life."

She continued her painting in dignified silence. Such nonsense was unworthy of a reply.

He sat there some time sullen: ill-temper is apt to take that turn, when it does not get answered. He kept watching her indefatigable pencil, till he lost all patience; at last, he suddenly looked up, with:

"Any commands for G—? I am going to ride over to G—, mother."

"What do you want at G—?" she asked, without lifting up her head. "You cannot be back to-night."

"Oh yes, I shall; and if I am not, don't fret about me. No commands? not a little inch of a ribbon I can get for you?"

"No, no."

"*Addio*, then — *addio*," said he, with a sudden return of spirit and gaiety. "And here, mother of mine, is a kiss upon each cheek; one, to plead my excuse with the Apollo, the other with the Laocoon. And now that I have jumped up from my chair, I am ready to vow what you will in honour of every hero or deity that ever was chiselled."

She took his kisses coldly, not playfully; but he did not seem to care, for his head was full of new thoughts, as he ran merrily down to the stable-yard.

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## CHAPTER XVIII.

MR. GORHAMBURY, though he had so completely given up his clerical duties, still kept his living at G—, and resided there a certain portion of every year. So that Philip had always a *pied-à-terre* in the city, where he very often took refuge when he found the solitary Castle in the mountains intolerable. It was indeed placed in a very wild and secluded situation, and almost reminded people of the Castle of Udolpho.

There was the usual solemn and quiet society in G—, which is common to most cathedral towns. But though the dances and parties were never very lively, there was often excellent music to be had, a peculiarity also common to cathedral towns, where the affairs and interests of the choir keep the subject uppermost in most people's minds.

There were many amateur singers among the gentlemen of the place, who gave the music of the best masses and that of our own old masters, and good living ones too, with excellent effect. Philip had a charming tenor voice; there was something of the tone and pathos of Rubini in his singing; and his assistance was ever most welcome in these agreeable evening concerts. Few indeed could hear him sing without emotion, for he did it with a truth, feeling and simplicity, which made its way direct to the heart, to say nothing of the handsome and expressive countenance,



which gave fresh sentiment to the words and tones he uttered. He was a dangerous man among the young ladies of G—, where staid, middle-aged, married men were plenty, but young ones like Philip, rare as the Phoenix. Indeed, the part of Phoenix he might literally be said to play at this time, for there was not one man in the place who could in the least compare with him, either as regarded personal or mental accomplishments.

Many a young lady sighed in secret, but sighed in vain, for the charming Philip Gorhambury; but not one could flatter herself with being the object even of a preference. There was a gaiety and gallantry — nay, something more — a touch of sentiment about him, which might have flattered and beguiled many a one; only these things were so generally diffused, his attentions so equitably distributed among his favourites, he professed to be so deeply in love with at least half a dozen fair ones at once, that it was impossible for the most obstinate self-delusion to persuade itself that there was anything approaching to real partiality for any one among them. They were consoled, these young ladies, as young ladies and all the world besides are apt to be; by the conviction, that if not fortunate themselves, no one could boast of better luck.

This pleasing idea was, however, a mistaken one, for there *was* one, whom Philip Gorhambury never mentioned, never praised, about whom he never made any of his wild professions of passion; one who seldom appeared at any evening parties, and when she did so, *mostly sat by*, disregarded, for she was only a poor *curate's daughter*, and the belles of the city scarcely *condescended to notice her*.

Philip rarely spoke to her in public; a ceremonious bow was the usual salute; perhaps a sentence or two might now and then be formally exchanged, that was all. Yet, some way, though no one noticed the coincidence, when she was present, the tones of his sweet and passionate voice were more thrilling, more intensely pathetic than ever, and the lovers of music would wonder at and applaud the sudden inspiration, while she sat retired, like the Egeria of old, shedding her influence, hidden, and unperceived.

But she of old was in a less dangerous situation than poor Hernana, for she dictated, but was not a witness of the effects she produced. She escaped, perhaps heart-free, perhaps not. It was Hernana's fate, however, to sit a silent and entranced listener, to tones which she knew were inspired by and addressed to her alone. One look directed to the corner where she sat, one expressive, momentary glance, would tell her to whom all this world of beautiful sound was dedicated.

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But now he is mounted upon his noble black horse, with shining coat and waving mane and tail, and hoofs that seem almost to scorn the ground; and he is bounding over the hills alone, drinking in the sweet mountain air, his bosom swelling, his intellectual brow dilating with thought and feeling — delicious, as they are high and pure.

*He was of that peculiar temperament which responds like the chords of some fine instrument to the*

harmony which is around him, and his heart constant, affectionate, and true, trembled with happiness as he thought of her to whom all his fond aspirations are devoted.

He has loved her all his life, he loves her still with a true and honest love — for herself. He knows not why — he cares not why — he loves her because she is Hernana.

Hernana is truth, energy, nobility of mind, reason, action. She is all this; but he loves these things because they are in *her* — not her because she is all this.

He loves her; that is enough. And like the carrier-pigeon needing no compass, by the instinct of love steering direct towards home; so Philip Gorhambury bounds over the hills, riding an unconscious steeple-chase, of which Hernana is the goal. He mounts a steep ascent, and then looks down; and below him in the valley lies the town of G —.

The grey towers of the cathedral rise in the midst with the full light of the sun upon them. The various habitations, intermingled with trees, lie there nestling among the hills, the broad majestic river rolling by, the green meadows with their herds and flocks, and hedge-banks, and rows of pollard-willow stretching far upon either side — a wilderness of houses, and trees, and fields, and gardens — how beautiful! He checked his horse, and looked down upon the scene; at first, filled with enthusiasm by the extreme beauty of the picture, and then beginning to endeavour to distinguish well-known objects. The place where he stood commanded almost a bird's-eye view of the city. *He could see the cathedral close, with its rows of*

lms and oaks, and distinguish the Deanery perfectly well. Then his eye travelled to the denser parts of the city, where thickly crowded houses, narrow lanes, small courts, and all the evidences that these were the tenements of the very poor presented themselves. This district was, however, traversed by one large and wide street of handsome houses, in the midst of which he could, even there, perceive his father's, as more lofty and imposing than any other.

It had tall ornamented chimneys and a high flight of steps, and a door with a Grecian pediment and pillars. He fancied he could see even these.

His father's church-steeple, a noble spire, rose at some little distance, from among this wilderness of squalid dwellings. Near it, his eye searched long.

It was difficult to distinguish the small obscure dwelling he sought — with its garden before and its garden behind — which was situated close by the churchyard. At last he thought he could single out the little green plots by one particular tree — a poplar tree it was — which rose like a giant not far from the garden-wall. Having settled this point, he seemed satisfied; and dismounting from his horse, prepared to lead him down the steep descent before him.

He reached the bottom of the hill, then he vaulted into his saddle, and plunging among the narrow lanes and courts, made his way to the well-known little gate.

A boy of his acquaintance, son of the sexton, was accustomed to take charge of Philip's horse when w, came this way. He now summoned him, and put a naster into his care, charging him as he value<sup>d</sup> he *ife not to mount himself*; and then walked by thouse,

of the brick wall which enclosed Mr. Lovel's little domain, till he came to the narrow high iron gate which closed the entrance to it.

He peeped through. The house Mr. Lovel occupied was the old parsonage; far too inconvenient for the requisites of modern luxury, as the Rector regarded them; and, therefore, it had been given up rent free to the Curate.

It was an old low building of dark brick, with pointed gables and casement windows, almost overgrown with ivy, pear trees, and creepers of various descriptions, which Hernana had trained up against the walls. It had a small court in front, occupied by a grass plot, which was equally divided by a paved walk running from the gate to the nouse; behind the house there was a somewhat larger space, occupied also by a grass plot, upon which grew a dwarf cherry tree, two small plantations of some dozen sycamores, laburnums, plane, and lilacs, on either hand; two flower borders, with a gravel walk between, running the whole length of the garden; and, on each side, the ground laid out as a kitchen garden of very slender dimensions.

The back garden was fenced in by privet hedges, cut, and pruned, and trained, till they exceeded the height of a tall man; the front was surrounded by the high wall of dark, coloured brick, of which I have spoken. The tall poplar tree growing outside, cast of shadow over the scene.

distit was a somewhat gloomy, yet not altogether un-  
*standing place*; and Philip loved it dearly. There was  
*He con* about the quiet old house, which belonged

not only to the present, but to the past; for he remembered well the wife of a former curate regaling him, a little child, with dainty cakes and rich cream in this very garden, before Hernana and her father had come to live there.

The churchyard, opposite to which the iron gate opened, was quite deserted, and Philip could stand at his leisure and look through unobserved.

He wanted to find out whether Mr. Lovel was at home or not. Much as he liked the daughter, the father was not in the least to his taste. His neglected dress; his dawdling, indifferent manner; the serious, almost severe, character of his virtue; each and all found something in Philip Gorhambury with which it was impossible they could harmonise.

He looked and peered about. The casement of the parlour window was open, and a throistle in a cage was singing and whistling there, evidently quite at its ease, and probably by itself. The window of Mr. Lovel's room above was likewise open, and no one to be seen stirring there either. He put his hand upon the latch, opened the gate noiselessly, and stole into the garden.

There were no dogs to be apprehended as giving alarm. A cat whisked through the bushes; she was the only inhabitant of the sort, except the throistle. There was not food enough in the *ménage* to provide for such pets, as dogs. So he made his entrance unobserved; and first he went to the parlour window, and looked in, but the parlour was empty. Hernana was *not there as usual*, writing or sewing. Then he *followed the path which led to the back of the house,*

and upon which the eating-room — for it merited the name of dining-room — and the window looked.

The casement of the eating-room was closed that of the kitchen was open. To it he stood hidden by a flanking white rose-bush, while another of rosemary, grew close by, he stood in.

Cobbett, in one of his wholesome books, exalts the potato as the bane of all domestic industry, magnifying the good brown loaf, draws a picture of a fine active young woman, drawing bread out of the oven.

But tastes differ. For there are tastes which are simple and wholesome, and tastes which are pure and vitiated; or as some, on the contrary, would say, tastes are refined, or tastes are vulgar.

Philip, the elegant child of fortune, and the fortune's notions and refinements, peeped into the kitchen; and there he saw — what think you? dark Spanish beauty; the Hernana of the shape, the large dark eye, the ebon hair; the tress, in short, whom he had in fancy attired in tilla and bugle flowered petticoat, with a shoe as delicate as to set the world on fire when she walked along the Alameda, employed — how?

How was Dulcinea del Toboso employed? Sancho was sent to her with a message — to fetch pearls?

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The kitchen was, as always, a perfect Dutch picture of neatness. The sanded floor, white as snow, the large kitchen table as emulously fair and clean; the little shelves, shining with bright copper vessels, or with rows of old china; where figured sundry strange figures, bowls and jugs, most rare and antique. They had belonged to Hernana's mother, who had been a Spaniard.

• The fire blazed cheerfully in the grate. Before it was a low fender, shining like silver, and upon a little square of crimson carpet that here covered the floor, lay a large tabby cat, reposing in all that domestic quiet comfort of which a reposing cat is so perfect a type. By the fire, in an old-fashioned arm-chair, dressed in the primitive style which one now sees no more, with a quilted black petticoat, open gown, snow-white apron, handkerchief quaintly crossed and pinned over her bosom, and a curious construction called a cap, white as swansdown, upon her head, her feet resting upon a footstool, sat the old house-keeper, as complete a figure of comfort and repose as the cat herself. Her cheek was pale, and she looked ill; and that accounted for the ever-busy housewife being at rest, whilst her tasks were performed by another. For there was a kneading-trough resting upon low tressels in the middle of the room, and there, kneading the bread for the family, was Hernana. Her beautiful arms were bare, her sleeves rolled back, her hair somewhat in disorder, a few raven locks escaping over her neck, and her cheek a little flushed. She was kneading away with all her might, little thinking how she looked, and only anxious to save the dear old



dependant from fatigue, and make her father so good bread.

Mrs. Alworthy groaned aloud, as she sat thus reposing, uttering many a lackaday! and welladay! to which lamentations Hernana, lifting up her head, would answer with a cheerful encouraging smile; and then return to her work, and knead on with the utmost industry.

And there stood the fastidious Philip gazing at her. And as he gazed, his heart was filled with strange emotions. She looked charming! she looked beautiful, even then! and he had it but too strongly impressed upon his heart how far more beautiful she could look at other times. But there was something in the employment which offended his taste, his false and somewhat tinselly taste. Something in her dress so common! — in the whole scene so vulgar! vulgar!!

Base and most inapplicable word! He was the vulgar one — not she. He, who was insensible to the moral beauty of a magnanimous simplicity — to the loveliness which lies in the detail of domestic life, however humble, when love and generosity are the elements in which it subsists.

And yet, meretricious as were his tastes, it was impossible that the little scene should be without charms for him. The reposing old woman; the beautiful energetical and simple figure of the girl.

There was a witchery in it. Where did the charm lie? Why could he not tear himself away? He thought he disliked the whole thing. It vexed him to see *Hernana* thus degrading herself; yet, strange contradiction!

he loved her more so than ever he had loved her before. He was angry, yet enchanted!

Oh, simple, unconventional life has a rare magic in it!

He stood there, watching her. The old woman groaned, and moved uneasily. Then Hernana wiped the dough hastily from her hands, and flew to her, and shifted a cushion that lay against the back of the chair; and soothed, and comforted, and kissed her, and returned to her occupation again.

He could stand it all no longer. He knocked at the window. She lifted up her head. First the scarlet colour flew to her cheek; and then she seemed ashamed of having been ashamed; and then, stripping the dough from her fair fingers; she laughed merrily, and came to the casement and unclasped it.

"Wonders are never to cease!" said he, half-vexed, yet half-pleased. "I see you have taken up a new trade to-day."

"Yes. Poor dear Mrs. Alworthy, there, is ill with the rheumatism; and bread *must* be had, you know."

"There are bakers in the town, I should think," he said, rather contemptuously.

"But it is cheaper to bake at home."

"Cheaper!"

"Yes, cheaper. I pray you, don't pronounce that word in such a contemptuous manner. It is the most esteemed of qualifications here."

"Yes, I know it; and sometimes, perhaps, regret it. The sordid, in no shape, is lovely — never amiable — seldom right," added he, peevishly.

"Sordid!" she repeated, a little hurt; then added — "A *necessary* economy is never sordid."

"It is absurd to talk in this way, Hernana. I know your father is not rich, but I also know that numbers of girls whose fathers cannot be better off than yours, would scorn to stoop to these sordid — yes, sordid! I can find no other word to express my ideas — these sordid occupations!"

She looked down for a moment.

What woman, however strong her character, however noble her notions, however high and pure her sentiments, can withstand the humiliation of appearing low and degraded in the eyes of the man she loves?

She may be fully sensible that he is wrong, and that she is right; that he is conventional and vulgar, and herself heroic and high; but she is unamiable in his eyes! and that is enough.

How many an honest duty has been sacrificed at this shrine of a false divinity! How many men with their shallow and tinselly views of female excellence, have given a wrong direction to many a loving heart!

She looked down, to blush, and feel her heart sinking, with a cold mortified sense of being abased in her lover's eyes. But this was not the first time that she had met with mortification where she knew she deserved esteem — and felt that the noble sacrifices made by self only met slight and contempt from men.

The world is made thus. The common sort value us more for what we do for ourselves, than for what we sacrifice to others.

Many a time before had something in Philip's manner, when she had been making some abnegation *of this kind*, humbling herself to the most lowly tasks, *denying* herself the most trifling piece of personal

adornment, to save a shilling or two for her father, often and often had his manner, pained and perplexed her, yet she had continued to persevere.

Her heart was of so high and generous a temper that every new pain seemed only to add force to her resolution, and stimulate her to persevere in the path of self-denial which she had chosen for herself.

Yet every recurrence of these little scenes of discontent on the part of Philip, gave her intense pain: she so loved to please him; and so longed for that appreciation upon his part, which she felt to be her due, and which is the sweetest, sweetest recompense upon this earth, to a woman — the assurance that he she loves, at least does her justice.

"I think," she said, lifting up her eyes, and looking at him with that grave serenity and strength, which he felt so irresistibly charming, "that you are unjust, Philip, when you call these things sordid in me; sordid seems to me to mean a love of sparing for sparing's sake — a love of money for money's sake, and the accumulation of it by paltry means; a love of low employments, because incapable of taking pleasure in higher. Does that cap fit me, or mine, Philip?"

"No, certainly; and it is because you are capable of what is higher, that it angers me to see in you a sort of strange perversity — for I repeat it — I never see other young ladies kneading bread. Look at your fists," said he, half-laughing, and still half-vexed, "are they fit for a drawing-room? A labourer's cottage, say, rather."

She held them up.

"I don't see much harm done as yet," she said, *with simplicity.*

*Castle Avon. I.*

"As yet! No, perhaps not, as yet! But how long is this to go on? And how do you think Molly the cook, and Betty the housemaid, get their coarse, red paws, but by doing just as you do? I am sure, Hernana, if my mother were once to see you, as I see you now, it would disgust her for ever."

"I should be sorry to disgust any one; most of all a woman of Mrs. Gorhambury's fine taste; yet to gratify taste we do not altogether live, — we must not altogether live. There is a line in the Catechism, Philip; it served me as a child, and it serves me still — 'to do my duty in that state into which it hath pleased God to call me.'"

"Pooh, nonsense! This line may be used as you use it, to justify any eccentricity. We shall have you talking of the rights of women next, I suppose."

"I don't think making bread was ever considered an undue exercise of the rights of women. Come, Philip, don't be cross; don't be vexed with me for doing that which you know I ought to do. Forgive me if I offend your taste, dear Philip, and do me the justice to believe it is no love of eccentricity, but a sincere desire to do my duty unswervingly, just as it comes. And," in a lower voice, "the poor thing is in such pain, I cannot let her do anything herself; and really we cannot afford to keep another servant, except for the very roughest work. Kneading the bread is so cleanly and so nice, you should not object to that, you know."

*It was such a sweet, fervent, persuasive voice; it would have rived, to use the old proverb, a heart out of a stone. It was all-powerful with him. He thought*

looked so majestic in her simplicity, so gentle in self-assertion and dignity.

He leaned against the window-sill and continued look into the room. The evening was closing fast, and as the shadows deepened outside, the cheerful brightness of the little apartment became all the brighter, the fire throwing up its flickering blaze and shining upon the coppers and china. He felt in his poet's soul, that which all poets feel, the invincible arm of nature.

"You look very comfortable here," said he.

Her countenance brightened, there was quite an algence upon it when she was happy.

"You think so. I think so. There is something a little quiet kitchen like this, which has great rights for me. I am luckily different from people in general, I believe; I really like these little comfortable places; I think if I lived in a great wilderness of a place I should be lost. Sometimes at the Deanery it seems almost a labour to get from one end of those large drawing-rooms to the other. If they are empty, they look desolate; and if they are filled, at a crowd it is! One or two friends, over a nice, blazing fire like that; is it not comfortable?"

Philip said nothing. Her countenance was so speaking, so animated whilst she said this — the more so exactly as she described it, there in all its peace and comfort before him. He could almost have wished his fate had consigned him to the same simple life she seemed to love, that necessity had forced him down to such a sphere, with her by his side. But necessity had done no such thing.

We cannot voluntarily degrade. He felt that. The more easy solution of the question, which in so form or other was now almost always uppermost his thoughts, was to elevate her to the place by side. For without her by his side, what was left? But then what would his mother say?

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## CHAPTER XIX.

BUT now the door of the little kitchen opened, and Lovel made his appearance. He had been hard work that day, among the very lowest of his rishioners; he was excessively tired, his shoes and gaiters were bespattered with mud, his hat was more worn, and his whole appearance more slovenly, to say beggarly, than ever.

Philip looked at him with unmixed disgust. He is dirty, positively dirty! shabby, mean, eccentric! What an absurd contempt he indulged in for all the proprieties men are accustomed to respect.

It angered Philip to see Hernana turn round, fly her shabby-looking, and, as he thought, disgusting her, clasp him fondly in her arms, and imprint a kiss on each cheek, exclaiming:

"Dear, dear papa! how tired you do look! and no had baked for your supper! What have I been out? Only stay a moment, and I will fetch you a loaf from the baker's; but sit down first," and she put him into a chair by the fire, and then kneeled down and began to unbutton his gaiters, and offer to take his dirty shoes.

"Oh, Miss Hernana, let me do that!" cried Mrs. worthy, offering to move.

"Be quiet, will you? and sit still! Dear, dear papa! how tired you do look!"



She, kneeling down and handling those bemired shoes and gaiters! This was to make bad worse with a vengeance. He drew back from the window disgusted. But it was soon to return again. He was bewitched! she had thrown a spell upon him! Do what she would — disgust, displeasure — she was Her-nana still!

Mr. Lovel *did* seem extremely faint and tired. He sank back in the arm-chair in which she had placed him; his colour faded; a wan blueness spread over his temples; he looked so wretchedly ill, that even the hard heart of pride and fastidiousness was touched.

Philip looked at him with some interest. She stood there gazing at her father, with a face in which love, reverence, tenderness, and anxiety were blended. Then she suddenly snatched up her bonnet, which lay upon a table near, and prepared to leave the house.

Philip was at the door before her, and met her there.

"You are not going out alone at this time of the evening?"

"Yes I must, do come with me; see how ill he is. He went out but poorly this morning — but what can keep him from his duty? The fever is about, and there are many, many — oh, so sick! and miserable! But he must have brandy now; he has been all day in those fever holes. Oh, how could I be so forgetful!"

She hurried on, Philip following in silence.

She came to the next public-house and entered without a moment's hesitation.

*Philip's feelings are indescribable as he stood at the door, not going in, but looking in, and seeing this*

angel of light and purity invested with a panoply, as it were, of virtue, entering this den of dirt and depravity, where two or three brutal fellows were laughing, smoking, and drinking. She hastily asked for some brandy, paid for it, and flew back to her father.

Rapidly she seemed to flit, rather than run along the streets; he following, but she did not appear to remember him. She was only thinking of her father. She opened the door of the house, and went in — Philip following; but he stood at the door of the little kitchen, as he had done at that of the gin-shop, not entering, but looking in; whilst she flew forward, quickly prepared a little brandy-and-water, and presented it to the pale lips of Mr. Lovel.

"Brandy! — no, my dear!" he said, drawing back and shaking his head.

"You must — you must! I was told so yesterday by the medical man at Lady Aylmer's — oh, how could I be so careless!" — she said, "when you came back, faint and sick, from those dens of misery and pestilence, that the best thing to preserve you from the fever, was a little hot brandy-and-water. Take it — take it, dear, dear papa!"

He took a little, though unwillingly, and said he perhaps should be the better for it.

"I feel ill," he added.

The old lady had risen from her chair and had hobbled up to her master as well as her stiffened limbs would permit.

"Yes, I am sure, Mr. Lovel — my dear master, you are ill: you have taken the fever. Oh, lackaday! lackaday!"

however, a skilful and experienced man; or rather a man who knew how to profit by experience — for experience offers herself to every one; the difference between man and man is, that whilst one gathers ingots of gold from the mingled sands as they run, another distinguishes, discerns, and appropriates nothing. This by the way. Philip hurried into the little shop, where a young man was standing behind the counter employed in preparing medicine. He looked surprised to see so fashionable and distinguished a young gentleman entering Mr. Singleton's door; and was beginning in the politest fashion he could invent, to inquire his errand. But —

"Is Mr. Singleton at home?" asked Philip, hastily.

"Yes, Sir, just come in; but he has been out since five o'clock this morning, and is sitting down to his tea. Anything I could have the pleasure of doing?"

"I want Mr. Singleton. Is this the way?"

And without waiting for permission, Philip entered a passage at the back of the shop, and opening a door, found himself in the parlour of the apothecary.

He was a small, singular-looking man; but with a countenance of remarkable acuteness. Poor man, he had just taken off his miry boots, after a journey of ten or twelve hours; and was enjoying the rest of his arm-chair, a comfortable cup of tea, a round of buttered toast, and his newspaper.

"Mr. Singleton!"

"At your service. I have not had the pleasure — Ay, ay, ay! I beg your pardon, Mr. Philip Gorham-bury. In what can I assist you, Sir?"

"Oh, pooh! It's not for myself; a patient —"

"Oh, dear! oh, deary me! can't the patient wait a

little? I am but just come in; I *must* have at least an hour's rest. Nature requires — I will be with the patient in three quarters of an hour."

"That won't do; you must come directly. Mr. Lovel has had a strange sort of seizure, and is —"

"Mr. Lovel is it?" starting up, and huddling on his great coat. "Mr. Lovel ill! Ay, ay! I knew but too well what it would all end in. The blessed saint and martyr! Got the fever! Ay! I'll lay a hundred pound to a shilling. Got the fever!"

He hurried into his shop, his great coat unbuttoned, and all abroad; and having quickly filled a bottle with some medicine, hastened with rapid steps down the street, Philip following him as fast as he could.

Mr. Singleton entered the kitchen, attended by Philip, but the little chamber was now empty. Even poor rippled Mrs. Alworthy had found her way upstairs.

The stairs opened into a passage close by the kitchen-door.

Mr. Singleton went to the foot, and called:

"Miss Hernana!"

She flew down to meet him.

Her face was flushed, and tears were upon it; her manner all distraction and confusion.

"Oh, you are come! Oh, thank you! bless you! He is very ill. What can it be?"

So the anxious, hurried, trembling voice was heard ringing on; whilst the old apothecary blundered as well as he could up the steep staircase, and soon his heavy footsteps were heard in the apartment above.

Philip remained standing by the kitchen fire, looking into the red embers, and in a deep reverie.

*The picture of humble life before him was so un-*

pleasant, so discordant, so inharmonious with all his ideas; and yet with a strange pertinacity, still the image of Hernana rested there, rested as something without which life, the world, all his advantages, and all his possessions, would be utterly nought and valueless.

He loved her; he felt, he knew that he loved her.

Something within him whispered that his love was a just, a generous, an ennobling love. That his preference was wise, was well-placed, was praiseworthy; that under its influence he should be a better man — should be a worthier, nobler human being; a happy man too — happy from the best and surest sources of happiness.

But then the picture had its reverse.

The reverse was made up of a host of insignificant nothings — vain trifles, which, to his false and fastidious taste, and enfeebled character, assumed a most unreasonable importance. A host of ideas, which one moment's serious appreciation of their true relative value, would have reduced to their just insignificance, kept painfully crowding into his mind; assailing him in the weakest part, and endeavouring, as in the old legend of the life's choice, to obscure by their meretricious glare, the grave but sublime attributes of the higher one.

Strange it is, but so it is. Even when men love deeply and sincerely — even when every inclination of the heart is prompting them, when they would gladly, thankfully accept the impulse from another, they want courage, manliness, and virtue to make the better choice for themselves. It requires a certain, nay, a *very considerable* amount of virtue, to dare to abide by a worthy choice, and do what would be the wisest

thing in the world, and which our hearts are yearning to do, when the idle voice of habit, worldly considerations, and the common course of things, are much opposed to it.

Oh! how much happiness do men hourly throw away because they have not the courage to seek it, where alone they can find it, in the unbiassed dictates of their own hearts.

Philip Gorhambury stood by that fire, gazing into those embers, divided between the sweetness of a generous well-placed love, and ten thousand vain, weak, trifling causes for doubt and irresolution.

His mother too! What would his mother say? What would she think of it? His thoughts glanced towards his father. He would be terribly disappointed, and would be dreadfully angry, but that he cared little for and could defy.

But his mother! his clever, talented, elegant, accomplished mother! Her contempt! How could he brook her contempt?

The utter scorn and pity with which he knew she would regard anything approaching to the generous romance of life; to that brave independence of the world's opinion in matters with which the world has no business to interfere. It was not the disappointment that she would feel, the pain he must necessarily inflict upon his mother that he troubled himself about; but her contemptuous pity! her forbearance! her blighting compassion! her indignant and unfeigned astonishment at his taste.

You see how much of a heart Philip Gorhambury possessed, or rather how far his education had tended to *extinguish* or to *develope* what good feeling nature

had bestowed upon him. So he stood at the fire, in a reverie, till Mr. Singleton was heard slowly descending the stairs, and he made his appearance in the kitchen, followed by Hernana.

Her hair was all in disorder, falling in fine picturesque masses about a face to which the emotions of her heart had given the noblest and most interesting expression. Intense feeling in some countenances produces this beautiful effect. This was eminently the case with that of Hernana.

The imaginative eye of Philip was struck almost with wonder, at the extraordinary beauty of the face and figure of her — who, little conscious of the effect she was producing, and far too much in earnest to think at that moment even of her lover — was in broken sentences anxiously inquiring from Mr. Singleton as to her father's condition.

The old man could give her little satisfaction. He could only exhort the young lady to firmness and fortitude; whilst she, almost heart-broken, drew from him the confession, that her father's illness had assumed a most threatening aspect, and in short, that his life was in danger. Then she was at last overcome, and the grief which burst forth was so natural and so deep, the feelings so tender and strong, which seemed for the moment to overwhelm her, that they forced their way to the sympathies of her lover, and completely vanquished him; but some fine scene in a tragedy would have done as much.

She had sunk down upon the little bench by the kitchen fire as soon as Mr. Singleton had taken his departure, and had abandoned herself for the moment to all the agonies of despair. He could resist it no

er; all that was really good in him was aroused, ent to her, sat down by her side, took her hand, as he tenderly pressed it, spoke, in those tones of y tenderness and strength so dear to a woman's , and entreated her to take comfort.

Dear, dear Hernana! Don't give way so! Don't don yourself to despair! The doctor told you was hope."

he shook her head.

Yes, he did indeed. And now, my love, compose self; listen to me; let us see what can be done, test Hernana," and the other hand was made pri- as he spoke. "You know you can command have no scruples — do we not understand each ? I have the means; you will not refuse to use ? Everything I possess is yours to employ. These s yield to proper treatment. What shall we do

Have you confidence in Mr. Singleton, or shall I in other advice? A nurse? Yes, you shall ntly have a nurse. Good wine? I heard Mr. eton say something of cordials — of keeping up? ather has excellent Madeira — or perhaps claret think I have heard claret recommended. Any- — everything — only tell me what shall be done "

o he ran rapidly on; holding her two hands grasped s, speaking in such a pitiful, earnest, feeling voice. or a moment — it was a human, it was a woman's ness, forgive it — every source of apprehension er father was drowned in a flood of rapturous joy. looked up at him, their eyes met. His were all nt passion; hers — Oh, the depths of feeling that id there! It was but the infirmity, of a moment



upon her part, however; she withdrew her hands, and endeavouring to recover the mastery over herself and to calm the beatings of her heart, said: "Oh, thank you! thank you, Philip! What is there I would not accept for my father from you?"

And he thought as she said so, there was that in her face, that in her form, that in the tones of her voice, that never woman had equalled, and that he loved her as never man loved woman before. And he was happy, happy beyond expression!

It took little time to settle between them what was best to be done. Philip proposed, as the first measure, to send his father's physician. This she refused, her confidence in Mr. Singleton was entire; but she accepted with thankfulness his next proposal, which was to find out a sick-nurse, and dispatch her to Hernana's assistance, for of this experienced help, she felt herself to be greatly in need.

Then Philip proposed wines, and various dainties; but these, she said, were not wanted at present; but he thought to himself that she might want them, and said so at last, conjuring her to remember her own health, and take care of herself, in accents which, though he did not exactly say so in words, expressed, that the happiness of another was concerned in her preservation. And thus persuaded, oh, with what an inward sense of joy, did she promise to do what she could, and to take the wine he said he would send her, or anything else that Mr. Singleton recommended.

*And still he kept dawdling and talking, and had something more to say; whilst she began to feel that she was doing wrong; that she was selfish; that she*

ght to be with her father — to think of nothing  
t her father.

At last, he went away, and she returned to the  
k bed up stairs. Oh, what a different being from  
e one who had left it but ten minutes before! Tread-  
g on air! her whole being changed — strengthened,  
ightened, ennobled! It was as if the very atmosphere  
existence was altered; its first conditions enhanced;  
w powers, new energies, new life, new joys! and  
, with it all, such generous, generous feelings! such  
warm swell of gratitude! such a noble impulse to  
pend all these new powers in the production of  
od — to diffuse and expend the happiness enjoyed,  
! it should warm every living being in the creation  
God! Such energy for duty! such power of en-  
rance! such lofty disregard of self, even when  
istence was become so inestimably precious!

Oh, this is a glorious passage of a woman's life!  
e first rapture, the first pure ecstasy of love!

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## CHAPTER XX.

PHILIP did not leave town, as he had intended, to rejoin his mother. Under the influence of the feelings which now entirely possessed him, he felt it impossible to quit the spot where Hernana was. All his best feelings were aroused; his love seemed to bring with it something which aroused all that was excellent in his character.

He walked down the streets of G —, towards the large and lofty house which his father occupied, engaged in ruminations wholesome and good. He was contrasting his mother's view of life, with that presented by Hernana; her simple devotion to the useful and the requisite, her unaffected obedience to the calls of affection and duty, with a life of devotion to art; and found in it a something wholesome and strengthening to the soul, in comparison with which the empty aims of the artist, be they the pursuit of the very highest forms of beauty, sank into insignificance.

What a vain, unsubstantial phantom, was this *beautiful*, when brought into comparison with the *good*!

In this his present mood, even the circumstances surrounding Hernana, which had been most unpleasing to his taste, assumed a different aspect. But, artist still in this, it was as if the charms of some lovely *home scene*, by Gainsborough or Collins, was contrasted with a Claude or a Poussin.

The very familiarity of the subject, the ease and tenderness of its daily aspect, gave an interest to the details never felt before.

That little kitchen! The old lady in the high-backed chair, the doting tortoiseshell cat, the brightly blazing fire, the flashing light reflected from the shelves, with their copper pots and pans; the snow-white sanded floor, the kettle humming its sleepy song, the fair creature with her dark feeling eyes, and her sable braids of hair, kneading at the bread-tub.

An hour or so ago he had not known whether to be most pleased or offended at the sight; but he had gone an age in love since then. He was fairly launched in the enchanted land, where everything takes for its true form — the prevailing glory.

So Philip Gorhambury walked, and so he mused, as we might fancy Tennyson doing, before the composition of one of his lovely, poetic pictures of ordinary everyday life. And his thoughts began to take words, and then to arrange themselves into rhythm, and into regular verses; so that when he reached the Rectory, the first thing he did was to turn into the library, where pen and ink stood ever ready, and to sit down and pen — not the following lines, for I spare you them; though I almost wish I had them by heart, which I have not, to show you how charmingly, very ordinary scenes may present themselves to the truly poetic spirit. The lines might have been an example and a warning; the very enthusiasm for the picturesque, displayed in them, might have led to *some* fear, how it actually was with the heart.

This, at least I fear, must be confessed, that Philip's dreams for the present, were of the present. The interest of the moment absorbed him. He looked not forward; and the sweet future of wife and home, so endearing when once entertained by man's imagination, if they presented themselves at all, loomed most indistinctly in the distance.

Hernana, on the other hand, like most other girls of her age, estimated the nature and strength of her lover's feelings, by the honesty and simplicity of her own. Women are so sincere in their attachments, when once attached — so truly devoted — their love is so completely their life, a thing to which every worldly, or interested consideration, is at once offered up without a thought — that they cannot understand how, too often, it is with men. How they can love and not love. Display, and that without insincerity, that which they at the moment honestly feel — namely, a vast deal of real attachment, and yet leave undone that which is in their power at any moment to do — secure the object of their passion, and stamp the future happiness of life, by the irrevocable word which makes of two, one.

The dawdling, the uncertainty, the hesitations of men, are a source of great and unintelligible misery to the sincere hearts of women: they cannot resist the evidence of, and finds it vain to attempt to disbelieve in, the existence of a passion which they every day expect will confirm its reality by words — words that never, never come! till hope and love languish and die — a long, dreary death of suffering.

Hernana sat by her father's bedside, watching him anxiously, but with a heart, so far as her own pro-

spects were concerned, overflowing with happiness. She had believed, she had hoped in Philip's attachment before; but now she felt assured of it. He loved her! And if he loved her, what should prevent their being happy?

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Lady Aylmer came the next morning, immediately upon hearing of Mr. Lovel's illness, to visit Hernana, and offer every assistance in her power.

She opened the door of the house, and entered the parlour. It was empty, so she made her way to the kitchen; and there they were. Hernana, as it would appear, had been making a little gruel for her father, and was preparing to pour it through a sieve and strain it into a small china basin. And who should be holding the sieve whilst she lifted up her saucepan with both hands? Who, but Philip Gorhambury!

Lady Aylmer started back with surprise. The kitchen-door stood open, so that her approach not having been perceived, the little scene was presented in all its simplicity.

She stood like one stupified with astonishment, and something of sadness and anxiety, expressed in her face. Philip was holding the sieve carefully in both hands, and he smiled upon Hernana with so much sweetness, as she lifted up the saucepan, and endeavoured to pour the gruel steadily in, and there was such a pretty exchange of little laughs, and then such a look of tenderness upon his part, and such a sudden glow of rapture over her whole countenance!

Lady Aylmer sighed, and for a moment turned away her head. This was a very painful sight to her. Painful — most painful, that Hernana should love Philip! but far more painful that Philip should seem to love Hernana! For Lady Aylmer knew, or thought she knew, the world. Her prejudices against the whole family of the Gorhamburys were strong, and the suspicion and ill-opinion which attached to the father, she had extended to the wife and the son. They were people she had never liked in her happier days. Their views of life, and ways of proceeding, were in contradiction to all her ideas. She thought them worldly, cold and calculating; and that the talents with which both mother and son unquestionably were endowed, only served to increase their faults.

It grieved her to think that such a heart as Hernana's — a heart so noble and so precious — should be bestowed, as many, many, another heart she had seen bestowed, upon one quite incapable of estimating its value. If he loved her — which he must, or why was he here? — it would be through his fancy, rather than his heart, even granting that he had one.

After the exchange of a few more affectionate looks and pleasant words between them, Hernana took her basin and went up stairs; and then he laid down his sieve and sighed, as young men in love do, they don't know why, and he went and sat down upon the settle by the fire, and leaned his head upon his hand and sighed again — sighed like a furnace, if there were any good in that.

Lady Aylmer hesitated whether to advance or retreat. She did not and could not like Philip Gorhambury; but that seemed no reason for absolute

avoidance, and it would look odd to go into the cold parlour without a fire, after a walk when a sharp easterly wind was blowing, merely to avoid meeting him. So Lady Aylmer entered the kitchen.

They knew each other by sight, though they had rarely spoken, and Lady Aylmer's story was well known to Philip, as was the interest she had shown Hernana. We have found his mother, in her way, alluding to it.

He started from his reverie upon hearing a foot-step: and perceiving who it was, rose hastily and came forward with a respect and politeness in his air, which was to her as unexpected as it was pleasing, offering her a seat by the fire, and saying something of coldness of the wind.

She looked at him — hesitated for a moment whether to accept a civility from his father's son; but the courtesy of his manner prevailed, she could not resist it; so she took the seat by the fire he presented, and to her astonishment, found herself sitting there, with the son of Mr. Gorhambury by her side.

She looked at *his* son! the son of him, whom she still in secret believed had, in some mysterious manner, a concern in the loss of her own. The firm belief that her son still existed, and would sooner or later reappear, neither time nor reflection could impair; and she had an undefined sense, of injustice done, a feeling, almost as if Mr. Gorhambury, by forcing himself into possession, had actually prevented that reappearance, on which her aching heart was ever dwelling, with a sort of restless, passionate, impatience.

*Strange and bitter* then, were those feelings with which she looked upon this fair and handsome young



man, now occupying her son's place, and contrasted with agony, the fate of her own child, exposed to all the evil chances of degradation and obscurity. Her pale and beautiful countenance, assumed the dark expression of grief amounting to despair. She turned her head away and covered her face with her hand.

He was so beautiful! Such a fine young creature! So full of life and manliness! Such a picture of youth in its strength and glory! And such might her son have been — perhaps was! — perhaps was! but where? oh, where? And this one, was standing in his place.

Philip was shocked at her emotion, the cause of which he did not comprehend; he knew, however, that Lady Aylmer and his father were not upon speaking terms, and had usually heard it attributed, to her evil temper and jealous pertinacity. Still the greatness of her fall, and the extent of her misfortunes, had excited in him many feelings of pity and interest; and the strange character of her beauty — ghostly beauty, as it might be called, for since that fatal period her cheek had never recovered the slightest colour — interested and touched him; so he endeavoured, by every means in his power, to overcome the disagreeable awkwardness of the situation, in which they both felt themselves.

He addressed the lady in the gentlest and most respectful manner, and though the question was merely as to whether she would let him disencumber her of her heavy cloak or not, the manner of it was almost irresistible.

*Insensibly, Lady Aylmer felt her aversion subdued, by the charm of Philip Gorhamby's manner, and suffered herself to slide into conversation with him.*

They talked of various things; of the news of the day; of art and literature; in all which matters, Philip showed himself a very competent and accomplished converser. He spoke of Mr. Lovel with much feeling, but not one word about his daughter; an omission which Lady Aylmer failed not to notice.

Presently Hernana appeared. She had been detained by her father's bedside, and came in apologizing for the delay. Lady Aylmer observed the heightened colour, the hesitating words, the anxious look upon both sides; and again she fixed her eyes inquiringly upon Philip.

There was not a doubt of the sincerity of his emotions, as betrayed by the sudden glow that spread over his countenance, as the fair girl entered; and the manner, half-confused, half-delighted, with which he performed some trifling service for her.

"How is your father, my dear? I am happy to hear he has had a better night," said Lady Aylmer.

"He is very much better, thank you, Madam. My mind is set at rest as regards present danger; but —"

"But what, my love?"

"There seems reason to fear" — and turning to Philip: "The physician you were so kind as to send this morning, appears to be of opinion, that it will be a long time before my father will be able to resume his duties, and that change of scene and air, so soon as he can bear removal, will be absolutely necessary."

"Does he say so?" cried Philip, with a look of anxiety; "and where does he talk of sending you?"

"We are not got quite so far as that," she answered, with a faint smile. "There is no hope of my father quitting his bed, for some weeks."

"Will he see me?" asked Lady Aylmer; "and can I not be of use to you, my dear? My experience beside a sick bed has been long and painful. It has made me a good nurse. You must let me assist you, Hernana, in the care of your valued father — and my best friend," she added.

Hernana's answer was a look full of gratitude.

"And I!" cried Philip: "what can I do?"

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The course of a love passage like this in which Hernana was engaged, would be tedious and uninteresting to follow. There were in it no events, except those minute ones, which lovers survey through magnifying glasses. No paroxysms of passion, no conversations full of interest and tenderness; for, to tell the truth, though everything between them proceeded as if they thoroughly understood each other — which for the time they did — no express declaration of his passion, had ever yet passed Philip Gorhambury's lips.

Everything, that love the most devoted could look, or do, was looked and done. Everything, save the one final irrevocable sentence. Everything, but the declaration in words that he loved her, and the demand in words, asking her for his wife.

She was satisfied without this. Indeed, she felt under the present circumstances, when it would have been impossible to appeal to her father, that there *was* delicacy and propriety in Philip Gorhambury's *conduct*; and his attachment was too unequivocally *displayed*, in every manner by which attachment can

be displayed, for her to feel any of those cruel alternations of hope and fear, by which many a girl's heart is worn out, and her health and spirits destroyed. She was as certain of her lover's truth and constancy, as of her own.

Lady Aylmer, who knew more of human nature, and was, as we know, not prejudiced in favour of the young lover, was not so well contented. She could not help wishing that something definite should pass. *She* could not help looking with doubt and distrust upon an attachment, where there were so many obstacles of pride and interest to overcome. Yet Philip Gorhambury put so little restraint upon his feelings, seemed so indifferent in displaying his devotion in her presence, that she felt it was almost injurious to doubt his sincerity. Doubt it, however, she could not help doing.

"Mr. Philip Gorhambury seems very assiduous in his attentions to your father," she said one day to Iernana. "I think it is very amiable of him. Few sons of rectors, think themselves under any obligation, to look after the comforts of their fathers' curates."

"Philip is very amiable — oh, so amiable!" sighed Iernana.

"A little too amiable for some of us, perhaps, Iernana."

"Perhaps so. I don't know — sometimes I hink —"

"What do you sometimes think?"

"How dangerous it must be, in a world so changeable as this, to love any one too entirely."

"I quite agree with you, my love: we ought not. *It is madness to build up idols in our hearts.* So much

may happen — such fearful changes and losses! But it is sometimes still more dangerous if we keep them.”

“I don’t quite understand, Madam.”

They were sitting in the little kitchen, the fire blazing cheerily, darkness creeping on. It was black night behind the casement window; but the fitfully blazing fire kept up an ever changing and ever cheering light within. It was a moment of peace, such as opens the heart to confidence.

In such moments, Hernana’s spirit would overflow with excessive happiness and joy: soothed by the tranquil cheerfulness around, and, as it were, at leisure to enjoy the secret felicity she possessed.

“My love, there is no human being that it is safe to make an idol of.”

“No, I suppose not; indeed, I believe it would be very wrong. It would be a form of idolatry, as you say; but I don’t know what case that exactly applies to just now.”

“Do you not? Nay, then —”

“If you mean,” said Hernana, looking up, “that I make an idol of Philip Gorhambury, indeed you are mistaken. I have had an affection for him since he was a boy; I honour all his fine and noble qualities, but I make no idol of him, for idolatry is the worship of what is false, and I worship in him what is true.”

“Heaven grant it prove so,” Lady Aylmer ejaculated, but not aloud.

She was silent a little time; then she said:

“And how long do you mean to go on worshipping thus?”

“As long as I live, if he deserve it.”

"And what is this worship to end in at last?"

Hernana coloured; but made no answer.

"Has *he* ever put that question to you?"

"He! how should he? Dear Lady Aylmer, I will not pretend to misunderstand what you mean; but how could he? How dare he, just now? My father ill! Orphan of a mother! — quite alone but for us!"

"And am I not your mother?"

"Yes; more than mother; but not, not — just, perhaps, to him."

"And — forgive me if I am indiscreet, dear girl, to allow for a tender friend's anxiety — has he never said anything; remotely hinted at least —"

"Oh! hundreds and hundreds of times!"

"Unequivocally; so that there could be no mistake?"

"What can you mean, dear Lady Aylmer? If you mean to ask whether he has declared himself in express terms — no; he has not, he could not; but oh, all the eloquence of looks and broken words being wanting, he has expressed his opinion in every possible way! I should be an unworthy, jealous creature to doubt him after what has passed."

Her faith was so serene and unhesitating; her confidence in his faith so complete; she looked so calmly, confidently happy, that Lady Aylmer could have excused herself for her own suspicions. She would have been anything to share in the young girl's assurance; but something withing forbade it. She loved not these ramburys. Why could not Philip speak out? Commit himself to *her* at least; do the generous thing *the truly, the only* generous thing for man to do

in such cases — commit himself, bind himself to the woman who loves him.

But this he never did. Time slipped on; and the tedious illness of Mr. Lovel at last terminated; but still nothing had been said that could irrevocably commit a man of honour — that is to say, in the common sense in which the word is usually applied to affairs of this description.

The illness of Mr. Lovel terminated, as the physician had foretold, in a languishing state of weakness, for which change of scene and air were reckoned indispensably necessary. It was proposed that he should go to Penzance, accompanied by his daughter and Lady Aylmer, who felt as if life would be insupportable, if left to herself, and deprived of the constant comfort and interest of their society; she therefore prepared to accompany them, knowing, likewise, that her doing so would much diminish the expense which must, in any case, prove a heavy drain upon Mr. Lovel's purse.

The proposal was accepted with gratitude and delight, by both father and daughter, and preparations began to be made, for their speedily setting out upon their journey. They were to be absent six months: the whole, in fact, of the winter, the later autumn, and early spring months, it being thought desirable to keep Mr. Lovel in the warm temperature of Cornwall during that period.

And now Mr. Lovel was down stairs again, and in an arm-chair by the parlour fire; but he was wan and feeble, a quite changed man; all his ancient spirit and energy gone, the mere shadow of his former self. The medical men, however, assured his anxious daughter,

that this extreme feebleness was only the usual consequence of such an illness as his had been; and that she would find the effects of the contemplated change of air almost miraculous.

Ill, however, as he was, he was down stairs. She was again under his protection; he was enabled to see his more intimate friends, and Philip Gorhambury, of course. And now the time was come, when every objection to a full and unequivocal declaration of his feelings, was done away. Every day, Hernana believed that something definite would be said, for she could not think it possible that she should be suffered to depart for six months in a state of uncertainty, now beginning to become very painful.

Philip, on his side, seemed conscious, that since Mr. Lovel had come down stairs, his position, as regarded Hernana, was changed, and his manner altered with it. Expressions of devotion disappeared; he became absent, and thoughtful, often embarrassed and ill at ease; it seemed as if every time he entered the house, he came with a resolution to say something, which yet never was said. And why?

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## CHAPTER XXI.

MRS. GORHAMBURY and her son sat together. They often sat so, talking confidentially, for they were very sincerely attached to each other — in their own peculiar way, be it understood, for their attachment was built up of a good deal of self-esteem, extended, as it were, to each other, as is often seen in characters of this egotistical sort. Such ones really can extend their self-love to their own near relations; this said self-love being often the strongest tie that exists between them.

Philip had instinctively kept the secret of his love for Hernana Lovel, as much as possible from his mother, and had to a considerable degree succeeded; but that lady was too clever and sharp-sighted to be altogether blinded as to this matter; and though, not aware of the full extent to which Philip's affections were engaged, was upon the watch for every opportunity of meeting and warding off the danger that threatened him. To divert the course of his thoughts and affections, by unremitting endeavours, and yet by methods that would not excite his observation, or alarm his jealousy, was the plan she proposed to herself; and she carried on the hidden warfare against poor Hernana's happiness, and what would have ensured her son's best safety and happiness, too, with a *cleverness* and undeviating perseverance worthy of a *better cause*.

For though she chose to consider this affair with Mr. Lovel's daughter, as a most unfortunate and degrading *mésalliance*, there was nothing to justify the feeling. Mr. Lovel was a gentleman by birth and education; his daughter gifted with everything that could best adorn a woman, wanting alone, in those exterior accomplishments, which are only to be obtained by the efforts of extraordinary natural genius, or at considerable expense in money. Neither could any portion be expected with the young lady, for money to advance there was none; it was not in the least needed; but such, too, is the way with many parents. Precisely because it was not needed; because Philip Gorhambury would have enough, and more than enough, for every rational purpose, Mrs. Gorhambury could not endure the idea, of his marrying a portionless girl.

The innumerable good qualities she possessed — her personal charms, her intellectual ability, her strong, yet amiable and most affectionate character — what were they in comparison with five or ten wretched thousands of pounds or so, when there was so large a fortune upon Philip's side? To marry a girl with nothing down, was to throw himself quite away!

"How absent you are, Philip, this morning," Mrs. Gorhambury began, as she sat before her easel, from which her eyes had been for some time diverted, employed in watching her son, who was sitting at a table, his pencil in his hand, with a sketch which he apparently intended to copy, stretched out before him. He seemed, however, not even to see it as he sat there, his hand in act as it were to draw, but never moving, and his eyes fixed upon the ground, in a per-

fect reverie. Now and then a deep sigh might be heard, and his sighing would seem to arouse him, for he would hastily raise his hand, look at the model before him, draw a line or two, and then relapse into his former inactivity. "How absent you are, Philip! what weighty matter, may I take a mother's liberty to ask, can have occurred in your somewhat too prosaic life, to weigh, as it would seem, so heavily upon your spirits? You have been sitting before that table, three good quarters of an hour by Shrewsbury clock, and fetching sighs like a furnace, as Rosalind would say, but doing no earthly thing besides."

He started like one conscience-struck at his mother's voice, and looked hurriedly up at her as she spoke; then most involuntarily there came another sigh. He strove to hide it up with a short cough, but his mother was not to be so imposed upon.

"Another!" she said. "What on earth can you have to sigh for, child?"

"Sigh! I don't know that I sighed. Nothing certainly, have I to sigh for." And he sighed again.

"Another, and another, and another!" said his mother. "My dear boy, don't hide the matter from me. I love you very, very much; more than even mothers in general love their sons, and it is the pride and joy of my life, to think that my society can form a portion of your happiness; but I am not so proud, or so vainglorious as to fancy I can constitute it entirely. My dear Philip, I guess pretty well what is the matter with you, though you strive to conceal it."

*He glanced quickly at her, with a conscious, anxious look. He knew well, as he thought, what must*

coming; and what should he say? — how should he parry the attack? Or had he not better confess the truth at once, cast himself upon his mother's indulgence, and have done with it?"

"I know well what is the matter with you —" he said.

He knew well, too.

"You are dying of *ennui* —"

He felt as one who has prepared himself to mount a difficult step in the dark, and his foot falls upon a plain ground. He was actually confounded by this sudden dispersion of his fears and difficulties.

"You are dying of *ennui*."

"No, mother, don't say so — don't think so."

"You are dying of *ennui*. All characters, of any mental superiority, are liable to be victimized, more or less, by that fiend, *ennui*; and the youthful, when the gifted, most of all. I may be able to bear the monotony of this castle, which, romantic as it may appear, is, after all, a sort of prison to the mind. I am no longer young. I have my own occupations and interests, and can get along very tolerably. But you — what can you do? I have been reflecting upon this for some time. You are dying of *ennui*, I see; and no tyrant ever invented a more cruel *supplice*, as our neighbours would call it."

Certainly, it was not of *ennui* that he was dying, dying he were; for his days and hours were full of interest — at times, of an almost devouring interest. He had of late become more in love than ever: and so much in love, that he began seriously to feel that *Bernana*, come what would, must be his wife; and to making up his mind to tell her so, in spite of the

number of disagreeables, of all sorts and sizes, that he knew would be consequent upon the measure.

He had been very much harassed, as people of a character like his are prone to be, with fears for his own happiness, and with the struggles arising between apprehensions and wishes that would not be reconciled. His heart had been full of passion, and his head full of debate. Certainly, he had not known *ennui*: from that evil, at least, his perplexing fate had preserved him.

Just at this moment, he was vexed by hesitations as to whether he should deny the accusation at once, or let it pass: whether to seize upon this opportunity for a full explanation, which he dreaded as much as he desired, or defer it to another, as if there *could* be a better.

"It is generous in you," she said, "to look, as you are at this moment doing, as if you would not own 'the soft impeachment;' generous to endeavour to conceal from your poor mother, that she cannot be all in all to your happiness. But it will not do. I know you, Philip, better than you, perhaps, know yourself; and at this moment, I am sure that you suffer from neither more nor less than *ennui*."

"No, mother, don't say so: pray don't repeat that. I assure you, *ennui* is the last feeling I have been suffering from these past two months. I have felt *ennui* often enough in my life, to know very well what it is; but I am not suffering from that cause now, I assure you."

"Perhaps you fancy so; but I tell you, *ennui* lies at the bottom of the mischief, depend upon it. What do

you ride into G— so often for, if it is not in search of excitement?"

He coloured a little, and said:

"I have not been seeking what is commonly called excitement."

"You don't think you have, perhaps; but I know you better; and I tell you, Philip — and trust me, who can read your heart as plainly as the hand-writing upon the wall — *ennui*, and nothing more nor less than *ennui*, lies at the root of the matter; and it is that which drives you to seek excitement in any form or mode that can divert the demon, and afford a chance of feeling interested."

"Indeed, mother, you totally and altogether misapprehend the matter in this instance."

"So you think; and indeed if you did not, the very excitement which you find so agreeable would be at an end. If you were not hoodwinked and blinded by strange sort of infatuation, you might ride to G—even mornings in the week, and you would not find yourself the better for it. Philip," she went on, assuming for the first time a more severe and earnest tone, "I must not have you throw away your life, like a young lieutenant in a marching regiment, in pursuit of something better to do with your time and thoughts. My son, I have been to blame. Blinded by my fondness, by the fatal self-flattery of believing that my affection could suffice for your happiness, I have done very wrong. I have suffered you to stagnate ere till the slightest interest in the world was too rateful and too dangerous. I repeat it — I will not suffer you any longer, like a young lad in a marching regiment, to be sick to death of having nothing to do."

I will not suffer you to fancy yourself in love — the word will out — because you have nothing better on earth to amuse your imagination with."

"Mother! what do you mean? I repeat it; you totally and entirely misapprehend the matter."

But she went on.

"Young men's first fancies, which they dignify to themselves with the sublime name of love, arise from various causes; sometimes it is the mere *besoin d'aimer*. Soft hearts, formed for the tender passion, easily find some girl or other, to be tender about, be it this or be it that, no matter. Others, whose minds and characters are of a different stamp, who require occupation because they have faculties to be occupied, fall in love because they have nothing else to do; deprived of the natural aliment required by their capacity, they want an object, and that is all. In this case the choice is usually fixed upon the one least eligible or least attainable, because what they seek is struggle, difficulty, interest, object to be sought, and obstacles to be overcome; and woe, woe to them if they do overcome them; if, unhappily, insurmountable obstructions are not found to arrest them in their career! Woe, woe to them, when that which owed its chief, its almost entire attraction to difficulty, ceases to be difficult, and becomes their own! An imprudent, ill-assorted marriage, may have something in it wonderfully captivating to an imagination rendered morbid by idleness; but woe, woe, when the imagination has no longer anything to do with the matter, and a man finds himself set down for life with his *humble*, ill-chosen companion!"

"Mother, all you are saying may be very wise,

may be very true, but I assure you it has nothing on earth to do in reference to me. I am not about to make an ill-assorted marriage, nor any marriage at all, that I know. I am greatly too young to sit down at present upon any terms. I must see more of life first."

"Unquestionably, undoubtedly. To own the truth to you, Philip, I did give you credit for more sense, more character, more manliness, than to fling away a life upon a fancy of the teens. Dear boy, it is time enough, as you say, to think of marriage ten years hence. You have the world to see, the world before you. You are not such a fool as to throw away the rich inheritance of an intellect such as yours, of a promise of life such as yours, upon one of those fond, dreamy fancies, which will possess lads of your age — there is no help for it — and which are only in danger of taking any form or consistency with a young man of sense, when he is so unfortunately left without sources of amusement and interest as you have lately been. I have been much to blame; you must forgive me for the sake of the cause, will you not, Philip? And now listen to me."

He felt at this moment as if all was as she described it. His love for Hernana set in contrast with the free, young man's life of excitement opening before him did appear as a fancy and a charm, which no man of sense would suffer to prevail over his better self, and to which none but an imbecile would sacrifice a life. And yet even whilst his recreant heart was saying this, a small still voice whispered other things; and the creature he had loved from a child rose up *before him*.



"I listen, mother," he said; "but, indeed, you are alarming yourself most unnecessarily about nothing at all."

"I have no doubt my fears out ran the occasion; but I assure you. the advice I am going to give, and the plan I am about to propose, have only been a little hastened. My selfish wish to keep you near me but a little the sooner overcome, because you have lately taken a somewhat Corydon-like behaviour and expression. I don't believe my Philip is really in any very great danger from a tall brown girl in a kitchen; but it is as well not to entangle the brown girl herself by little acts of kindness and attention, which brown girls in kitchens are very apt to misunderstand, or pretend they misunderstand; and therefore, my dear, as in the cases we have supposed, flight is the best security for all parties, I advise you to be wise in time, and order a pair of post-horses to your phaeton, and be off for Bath, which is now in the full tide of the season; and thence you can go to the continent, or anywhere else it may like you best — only don't let me see your face again for ten months at least. And I assure you, the Spartan mother, when she armed her son and sent him forth to battle without a tear, did not act much more heroically than I am doing at this moment, Philip."

And she looked at him with much and genuine emotion. She had very great influence with him, the more so that he was of so unstable a nature. People of a good deal of imagination without much strength of character are usually the victims of irresolution. *They would and they would not; would have, without accepting the conditions annexed to the having; would*

refuse, without incurring the loss of happiness incident to refusal.

The manner in which this mother of his, whose intellect, taste, and knowledge of the world, he so highly estimated — the way in which she spoke of his attachment, seemed at once greatly to disenchant the subject.

He began to wonder that he could have seriously entertained the idea of making Hernana Lovel, the daughter of a poor half-pay officer and curate, the brown girl busy in a kitchen, his wife. Regrets, tender remembrances, there might be — those gentle pullings at the heart with which a true love, like our good angel, seems to recall us to the sense of the pure and the truly wise and right; but he resisted them.

The evil influence — the world, the terrible world! with its dread laugh, its demands, its fancied obligations, spoke so loud, and spoke so emphatically when it borrowed his mother's voice!

He was silent; he seemed reflecting upon what she had urged. The woman that deliberates is lost — so is the man.

"Indeed, I am right," she went on, encouraged by the hesitation she read in his countenance. "I am sure the more you reflect upon the subject, the more you will find cause to acknowledge the justice of what I say. Add to which there is this consideration: the plan I propose involves no consequences. Your absence for a short time from G — will give you time to look about you, to think twice. And, oh, Philip! think twice, think a thousand times, before you throw your life away. Away, for what? an idle love dream, such as every

young man of your age has dreamed in his turn, and every young man has, in his turn, awakened from."

"Mother! There is much truth in what you say, there is much in it to which I assent, much to which I absolutely refuse to assent. 'I should like, I think I ought to see *Hernana* — as the secret will out — I ought to see her again before I come to a conclusion."

"Exactly what I most particularly beg and desire that you will *not* do. Exactly what, if you are wise or know yourself, you will avoid doing. No; what I wish is, that you should try the strength of this attachment which you imagine you feel — try it fairly. If you see her under the influence of your present sentiments, you will only strengthen the illusion under which you lie. Besides, it is due to her, as well as to yourself, not to hold out delusive expectations. Your sudden departure will be a truthful, honourable proceeding. It will at once put an end to any —"

"Mother, if I have raised expectations, I ought to fulfil them."

"Idle nonsense! you can have raised no just expectations. What castles in the air a silly girl may build without any foundation, is nothing to you or to any one. The only point that concerns your honour is, *not* to give a foundation for such romances. You effectually avoid this by going away to Bath for a week or two, commissioning me to convey your adieux to the fair lady, a thing I will readily undertake to do; indeed, I ought to call and inquire after Mr. Lovel. Dear Philip be ruled by me. For my sake! for all our sakes! for the sake of the happiness of your whole *future life*! What I propose is wise, believe me, it is. *And take it in the most unfavourable point of view;*

it do  
ing to  
a return  
you wish

o no good, at least it can do no harm. It is but to Bath! What is the distance from Bath? You sturn home in ten days or earlier, at any moment rish it.

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## CHAPTER XXII.

Two days after this conversation a handsome chariot stopped at Mr. Lovel's door, and a finely-powdered footman inquired whether Miss Lovel was at home, giving the name of Mrs. Gorhambury.

Oh, how Hernana's heart began to flutter and beat! It was now an unusually long time since she had seen Philip — three days at least. She had become so accustomed to a visit from him every day, that it appeared to her an age. What could have kept him away so long? And now his mother was come in his place. Why did his mother come just now? she who so rarely — scarcely once in a year — honoured the Curate with a call. Could she — could there be anything relating to Philip which brought her here in his place? The words, she hoped for long expected words, had often appeared to be just fluttering upon Philip's lips — they had not been said. Could he have employed his mother? Was she likely? Would *she* say them?

Hernana, be it observed, had no comprehension of the enormous breadth of the gulf which in Mrs. Gorhambury's opinion, separated her from Philip. She *felt* rather, it may be said, than *knew* her own value. Though she could not touch the pianoforte like Henry Herz, or sing like Giulia Grisi, nor sketch like De Wint, nor speak six languages, she knew the value of a heart like hers; of such deep attachment, of such

truth and sincerity, of a character so vigorous and so able. She felt instinctively the real value such things must prove to any one, most of all to a man like Philip.

Not in self-conceit, not making a false estimate of herself, was this done, for in fact she made no estimate at all; but she felt that she suited him, and that she deserved him, and that the love they bore each other would secure the felicity of each. She felt that had their worldly positions been exchanged, she would have chosen Philip before all mankind. She believed that he felt the same strong and generous determination with regard to her. So she prepared herself to go down and meet Mrs. Gorhambury, with considerable emotion, no doubt, but without either trepidation or false shame; and as she turned the lock and entered the little parlour where Mrs. Gorhambury was sitting, the spirit and grace of her air and figure, her fine countenance, with the colour slightly raised, and her eyes so large, lustrous, and beautiful, moved that lady in a way she was not exactly prepared for.

Mrs. Gorhambury was too genuinely the artist not to be very much struck with beauty of form or expression whenever she might meet with it. She ceased at once to wonder at her son's taste, and rejoiced that she had that morning safely started him off for Bath.

Not that Hernana's figure was regularly symmetrical, or delicately rounded as that of the heroine of such a romance ought to have been; for she was, perhaps, rather too tall, her limbs larger than a just proportion would have allowed, and her figure somewhat wanting in those softer curves of outline which belong to perfect female beauty; but it was the elasticity, the

spirit, the life, which pervaded all, that something indescribable, which at once assures us that the possessor of such an exterior is one far above the common sort, something of the classical — of the heroic age. Mrs. Gorhambury could not settle with herself exactly how it was.

But she was wonderfully pleased, determined as she had been not to be pleased. She no longer marvelled, as I said, at Philip's infatuation; but this very admiration was inimical to poor Hernana's interests; the more Mrs. Gorhambury saw reason to dread the power of her attractions, the more she resolved to put a stop to the affair and prevent future intercourse.

Hernana came in, as I have said, looking as she was, a remarkably fine, striking girl, with her colour a little heightened, for her heart in truth was beating fast, yet no weak, nervous fear, no base self-desertion were sinking that heart, or those free and wholesome spirits. She knew Philip Gorhambury loved her; and she believed in his truth and fidelity, for she judged him by herself.

She felt certain that Mrs. Gorhambury's unexpected visit must have some reference to what deeply affected her. Not that she expected that Philip would have delegated to his mother the office of declaring his sentiments — an office he was so well fitted to discharge himself; but Mrs. Gorhambury so very rarely, or never, came to the house of her husband's Curate, that she could not help looking upon this unusual piece of condescension upon her part, an omen upon the right side, a sign that she was beginning to take interest in herself for the sake of her son. Therefore, *it was with far more pleasure than she was accustomed*

to feel when about to meet that lady, that Hernana had obeyed the summons to attend her down stairs.

Mrs. Gorhambury was seated in the little parlour upon the only large chair in the room, one devoted to Mr. Lovel's comfort, but which now stood empty by the window. This window looked out upon the little garden, which generally, through the care of Hernana, was neat and pretty, though she had far too much work upon her hands to be able to bestow much pains or time upon it, and her father had far too many uses for his money to allow of her employing the labour of others upon this innocent piece of luxury. I wish I could say that it ever looked so pretty and so trim as it would have done if Hernana had found little else to do but look after it. A garden, such as one sees sometimes, and reads of very often, it never was; and now, long neglected during Mr. Lovel's tedious illness, it was become a perfect wilderness, and anything but a pleasing wilderness.

For it was that time of the year when autumn is in the sere and yellow leaf, or rather in the black and sodden stem; and broken sunflower stalks, and miserable, half-dying chrysantheums, were to be seen, with Chinese roses putting out a few pinkish, deplorable, sickly flowers among their straggling branches. The little grass-plot was all rough with untrimmed grass, and half covered with decaying leaves. Such was the cottage garden upon which the eyes of Mrs. Gorhambury, the poet, the artist, and the fine lady in one, were bent with an expression of disgust, somewhat more than the occasion required.

For, *after all*, it was but a bit of garden-ground *that was rough*. All within the house was clean to



precision, and looked neat, in spite of the homeliness of the furniture. So, at this time of the year, and occupied in pious cares as she had been, methinks Hernana might have escaped contempt and censure for her neglected garden.

But Mrs. Gorhambury was in a humour to see everything in the worst light; and the dreary spectacle of vegetable disorder before her eyes she chose to accept as an indication of that want of delicacy in habits and taste within, which she allowed to herself as a just reason for dreading this *mésalliance* for her son; choosing to forget the inveterate and unfeeling pride which lay concealed under all these petty pretences.

The state of the garden might be disgusting; but the mien and carriage of the young girl as she entered the room, gave rise to other sensations. There was the undefined air of superiority belonging to a free and generous spirit about her, which filled Mrs. Gorhambury, as I have said, with sentiments partly of admiration, and partly of apprehension, which she found very particularly disagreeable.

"I am sorry to have kept you waiting, Madam," began Hernana, as she entered the room; "I beg your pardon for the delay. My father was just being put into his bed again, and I could not leave him till it was done."

"How is Mr. Lovel? I hope better. I called to inquire after him, to satisfy my own anxiety upon the subject, and report to Mr. Gorhambury. I hope you can give me a more favourable account."

"Not much more favourable," said Hernana, sadly. "My father is still very, very ill. Something there is

about him which yields to no medicines prescribed; a languor and weakness it is impossible to conquer. He is very much grieved for the inconvenience to which he fears he must be putting Mr. Gorhambury; but how can he help it? And, then, this dreadful fever was caught in the discharge of his duty."

"I have heard so. I think it is a pity to run such risks, and for purposes of, I fear, very doubtful utility; for, after all, what can be done? The apothecary, and a good bottle of wine or two, I presume is the principal thing."

"Oh, Madam! —" then she stopped herself.

She felt as if there would be a certain air of presumption, of conceit, in saying more upon this subject to one so much older, and who should have been so much better taught than herself; she marvelled, and was silent.

Mrs. Gorhambury seemed to read her thoughts.

"Do not misunderstand me," she went on; "I know all you would say;" and then she muttered something about death-bed repentance and enthusiasm.

"My father thinks," began Hernana, and then she stopped again.

"Oh! you need not tell me what Mr. Lovel thinks upon these subjects," Mrs. Gorhambury continued, with the slightest possible acerbity in her tone; "we all know his high notions of duty, and his peculiar opinions upon certain subjects. I only wish the consequences had not stretched him upon a sick bed, and laid him up useless for months."

The heart of Hernana began to beat faster. It was a rebel heart, and it would beat high when in-

dignant. The colour flew to her usually pale face; but she said nothing.

She turned a little away, that was the only external sign of anger, or disgust, which she gave.

Mrs. Gorhambury either did not, or was too proud to show, that she perceived or cared for the little demonstration. She dropped the subject, and went on with a manner altogether unconcerned.

"What are your plans? What are you about to do? What does Mr. Fenmore advise?"

"The doctor says, Madam, that change of air is absolutely necessary; and we are thinking of trying what a journey of a few weeks will do. By my father's desire, I wrote to Mr. Gorhambury upon the subject this morning."

"A journey! This is a strange resolution enough; and odd, that Mr. Gorhambury was not informed of it before. *His* convenience seems not very particularly attended to in this."

"Dear Madam, what can we do? My poor father is too helpless to be of the slightest use to Mr. Gorhambury; yet he was most anxious to stay upon the spot, in hopes of being soon able to resume his duties. It was not till this morning that Mr. Fenmore mentioned the subject, and proposed the plan with so much urgency, that at last I persuaded my father to allow me to write to Mr. Gorhambury."

"Mr. Fenmore! This morning!" Mrs. Gorhambury mused for awhile. "This morning, don't you say? And where, if I may take the liberty of asking, is it *your intention* to go?"

"*That point* is not settled yet. It must depend upon my father's strength. And to own the truth,"

she added, colouring a little, "upon the strength of his purse."

"Are you to go to the sea coast?"

"No, I believe not. Mr. Fenmore recommends a change to some inland place, where my father will enjoy change of air, and have the advantage at the same time of good medical attendance, which he is not, indeed, at present, in a fit state to do without."

"Perhaps Bath would suit you. Perhaps, Bath is the place you are going to," said Mrs. Gorhambury, speaking with a certain hesitation and difficulty.

"No, I believe not. Rather, perhaps, Clifton, or the Hot Wells; or, if we can manage it —"

"Clifton! the Hot Wells. They are very near Bath," said Mrs. Gorhambury.

"I believe so."

"I presume Miss Lovel *knows* that."

"I might have said so. But the place Mr. Fenmore particularly recommended is Launceston, or Penzance, in Cornwall; though the last I believe is near the sea."

"But you prefer Clifton or the Hot Wells, because they are near Bath, eh, Miss Lovel?"

"I know nothing of Bath. My only reason for preferring Clifton is that it is nearer, and the journey will be less expensive. I know nothing of Bath. We have no reason for wishing to be near Bath."

"Oh!" said Mrs. Gorhambury, drily, "I thought you might prefer it, as it is just the high season for Bath. But I forgot — you profess to despise the world, and are indifferent to its times and seasons."

"I cannot profess to despise that which I never *knew*; and probably —" but she altered the word to

"perhaps," for she was truth itself — "and perhaps never shall know."

Mrs. Gorhambury marked the change, and it irritated and provoked her very much. She felt quite angry; so she repeated the word.

"Perhaps! Oh then, Miss Lovel *has* some expectation of being introduced into the great world some time or other."

"No one knows what may happen to them," answered Hernana.

"True; no one knows. But most of us may form a pretty shrewd guess. Well, I keep very much aloof from it myself; but I do not pretend to share your indifference upon the subject just at this moment. I hear Bath is unusually gay and pleasant, and I heartily wish it may be so, for Philip started for the place yesterday in high spirits, and full of anticipations of enjoyment. It is his first season, though I prophecy it will not be his last. I heartily hope his expectations of pleasure will not be disappointed. All the world of beauty and fashion is there, as the vulgar newspapers have it, and —"

"My dear Miss Lovel, what's the matter with you? You look suddenly taken ill; quite pale — over-fatigue. Pray, try my smelling-bottle."

"No, thank you, Ma'am," putting it coldly aside with her hand. "I am not very strong just now; but the fresh air is the best thing. I will take a turn upon the grass-plot, if you will give me leave, and return again."

*Yes; it should be the grass-plot — the grass-plot in front of the parlour windows. Mrs. Gorhambury*

should not think that she was gone away to cry about it.

Fresh air would enable her to hold up till this cruel, cruel woman was gone: that was all she just then wanted.

"Go, my dear, by all means," said Mrs. Gorham-bury, in a milder tone; for she could not help being a little touched by the dismay written in the fallen countenance.

If Hernana had not been endowed with a courage and fortitude far beyond the common, she never could have stood the shock as she did. She must have given way to a burst of tears, or fallen flat upon the ground; but shed a tear she would not, and faint she did not, though the room was swimming round her; shrill noises were in her ears, and she scarcely knew where she was.

She managed, however, to escape into the garden; took two or three turns upon the little grass-plot, just in front of the windows; Mrs. Gorham-bury still sitting there, and, as she knew, watching her; and then, having collected her scared and distracted spirits, and composed herself as well as she could, she re-entered the room.

And Mrs. Gorham-bury, pitiless as ever, (for these unequivocal signs of emotion betrayed, as she thought, the secret understanding between the two), went on as if finishing her sentence:

"And so I supposed you too might be going to Bath, or into the neighbourhood of Bath?"

"No, Madam; certainly not. Mr. Fenmore wishes to go to Launceston, as I believe I had the honour of *telling you.*"

"He is quite right: I am glad to hear you have come to that determination," said Mrs. Gorhambury, greatly relieved. "Mr. Fenmore is unquestionably right. The air of Bath, even of Clifton and the Hot Wells, has something bleak in it, after all. Launceston, on the other hand, is the Madeira of England, I have been told; I never was there. Besides, you will find it very cheap; and the difference of prices will more than compensate for the difference in the length of the journey. But I am afraid you still hanker after Bath."

"What should make you think so, Mrs. Gorhambury? No, there is no hankering, indeed: Bath is the last place upon earth that I should wish to go to."

"Keep to that resolution, for it is the wisest you can make, in every point of view," said Mrs. Gorhambury, with some emphasis, as she rose to go; for Hernana's colour changed so alarmingly, she was in terror lest there should be a scene; and as the traveller, descriing the signals of approaching storm, hurries to shelter, Mrs. Gorhambury hastened to take refuge in her carriage. "I must be gone. Don't ring the bell. Pray, don't trouble yourself: I can open the door myself. I shall be glad to hear of your safe arrival at Launceston. And can we be of any use? There is our cart; it is doing nothing at the Rectory. It can take your baggage to the coach. Anything else?"

But Hernana spoke not. She could not force her voice to utter a syllable of thanks. She would not stretch forth her hand to take the offered one of Mrs. Gorhambury, who, triumphing in her success, extended *it with every appearance of cordiality and good-humour.*

*This cordiality and good-humour made Hernana*

feel more heart-sick than all the rest. The anger she could stand; the good-humour made her feel almost hatred.

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Gone to Bath! Well, and why should he not go to Bath? Was there anything so unreasonable in his wishing to go to Bath? anything so unheard of, in a young man taking such a measure, that it should produce all the effect it did upon Hernana?

Philip was gone to Bath to be very gay there, that was all she had heard; and Philip had taken his departure without coming to take leave. Perhaps this was unavoidable. She felt, she knew that it was not unavoidable. Perhaps he would write to her, to inquire after her father, to explain why he went away thus suddenly.

No! She knew that he would *not* write. It was all over between them. The world had seized its victim. Philip would be but a too easy one. She was not altogether deceived as to Philip's character, much as she loved and admired him. She felt that he was not made of that stuff of which the great, the heroic are made; and she felt that to adhere to his preference for her would, under the circumstances, savour of the great and the heroic.

She cast one despairing glance around her. It was all darkness. It was as if every light of her life had gone out at once.

Philip had been the loadstar of her existence ever *since she remembered her existence*; the object to



which, as by a natural magnetic influence, she  
Whilst he had been there, all things else had  
comparison indifferent, as regarded joy or  
with only the exception of her father and Lady  
and even those too, dear as they were! oh, how  
it was! Philip had been the secret source of  
ineffable, consolations and supports so precious  
strong, so inexhaustible! His affection first, and  
his love, had so entirely constituted the existence  
that now all was suddenly swept away, she  
chaos were, indeed, come again.

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## CHAPTER XXIII.

EN Mrs. Gorhambury went next to visit another lady.

There, there was another young lady just arrived at and before Mrs. Gorhambury left town, most ly she must go and pay her a visit.

is young lady is the daughter of the Lady Maria ore, and of the Dean Westmore, of G —, to I slightly introduced you at the beginning of story.

ria, for she is called after her mother, has just ted her education at a highly fashionable board-school; and has returned home to be introduced e world, and, in due time, married, and all and she seems set apart as one of fortune's tes, to accumulate around herself all the good of this life, and make a very slender experience anxieties and sorrows.

is excessively pretty, extremely sweet-temper- l kind-hearted enough; very elegant in her dress bits, moderately well educated in more im- respects; highly talented, she is called, which in this case that she possesses a remarkable for music; but more than all this, she is er to Lady Maria, and the Dean of G —, con- tly a person of the first importance in her own circle.

. Gorhambury has had her eye upon this

young lady for her son Philip ever since she was born. Mr. Gorhambury, in his arbitrary way of arranging things, has, because he wishes and chooses it, looked upon the matter as of course settled. The Dean and Lady Maria have in some way or other accustomed themselves to think it is to be, without taking any particular pains to bring it about; for the Dean is a man of too much sense, and we may add of a matrimonial nature; and Lady Maria is too much accustomed to let things take their course to adopt very energetic measures to secure any plan.

All that has been done, therefore, upon their side has been to suffer the two young people to pass a good deal of their time together. Little aware were they of what they were doing, or that while, Philip Gorhambury was nourishing a romantic passion for the Curate's daughter, the Dean's daughter was giving all her girl's heart, such as it was, to him.

A dangerous youth this Philip Gorhambury, it would seem, since two girls so extremely unlike, as were Hernana and Maria, should alike be bewitched by him.

Maria's love had, however, as yet been a hidden thing — hidden at least from every one but her bosom friend at school, a certain Miss Harriet Manvers, to whose sympathising bosom she had confided her passion, and from whom she had received all the encouragement which loftiness of feeling to condescend to any schemes one romantic young lady is accustomed to bestow upon the love-tale of another.

*In this instance, however, the fair heroine's attachment was not productive of any dire wretched-*

ness, for there was a sort of atmosphere of encouragement around her. Philip Gorhambury was flattering and attentive, smiled very sweetly, and rattled away very gaily when in her presence. He had the run of the Deanery, and was a welcome guest whenever he made his appearance, which the close intimacy of the families rendered a very constant occurrence; this being, however, too habitually his custom from childhood to be significant of any peculiar feeling or remark.

But Marion was far too young and inexperienced to think of distinctions of this nature, and quite inclined to put the interpretation of her friend, Miss Harriet Manvers, upon Philip's visits. Though, certainly, to one more acquainted with the symptoms of such things, the easy manner in which Philip treated Maria, which had every appearance of being merely that of a young man's good-natured indulgence to a pretty school-girl, would have given no encouragement to more serious hopes or expectations.

But be that as it might, with the other members of the family, Maria found herself an object of the greatest partiality and indulgence, and for Philip's sake she loved Mrs. Gorhambury very much, and even found it possible to love harsh, unamiable Mr. Gorhambury himself, after a manner. So she was delighted when she heard Mrs. Gorhambury's name announced, as the footman opened the door of the drawing-room in which she was sitting with her mother.

Maria had been absent for about eighteen months, during which none of the Gorhamburys had seen her. *These months had been the finishing months. She*

went away a thin, lanky girl, in a white frock and a long sash, looking gawky and unformed, as girls at that age are apt to do; she had returned, a young lady complete, in a dress of the first fashion, admirably adapted to display the beauty of her form and figure, both of which had in the course of that time ripened into something very pretty indeed.

Mrs. Gorhambury called to pay her first visit to the young lady as young lady. I ought to have added, that after the finishing year at school, Maria had spent six months, accompanied by her mother, partly in London, partly in visiting among her mother's relations. She had been presented, and so forth, and was now come back, still quite as much in love with Philip Gorhambury as ever. For, after all, though she had been a good deal out, she had not mingled much with the gay world. The people she belonged to, being rather a formal, old-fashioned set, she had not been thrown into the society of young people of her own age; so, even if her little heart had been inclined to inconstancy, there had been small opportunity for it.

She was delighted, therefore, to hear Mrs. Gorhambury announced, and rose up with a face animated with pleasure as that lady entered the room, and who having made her compliments to Lady Maria, turned towards the daughter, holding out both her hands. She started back as she did so with a little cry of pleased surprise; then advancing, took her by *the hand*, and drawing her forwards, gazed at her for *a moment* or two with a look of the most gratified

affection, and then saluting her upon each cheek, said:

"My dear, you must allow an old friend — I have known you from your long frocks, you know. How you are grown; and how well you look!" And she turned to Lady Maria with a sort of appeal, as if to say, is she not charming?

Lady Maria thought so, but was of so inveterately quiet and impassible a nature, that not even the admiration excited by her own daughter could move her much. She responded by a calm, self-satisfied smile, to Mrs. Gorhambury's animated glance.

"What a cotton-wool doll it is," thought that lady; "but the girl is charming." And then she secretly congratulated herself upon her morning's work; rejoicing that Philip was off for Bath, and that Hernana was on the move for Cornwall, or the Madeiras, if possible. Yes, it should be to the Madeiras, if possible. The absurd affair — if it could even be called an affair — was ended, and Philip would return to see Maria in all her beauty, his fancy no longer disturbed, as she hoped, by another image.

"How she is grown and altered!" repeated Mrs. Gorhambury, sitting down by Lady Maria, her eyes still fixed in delighted admiration upon Miss Westmore. "She is perfectly charming!" she whispered. "I always thought she promised to be very pretty, but anything so perfectly lovely as this, I never anticipated."

"Do you think so?" lifting her glass and looking at her daughter. "Yes, I believe she is thought pretty well by some people."

"And my dear," turning to Miss Westmore, "I *hope* your fine musical talent has not been neglected.

I trust your pianoforte has not been forgotten in the midst of the gaieties of the great world you have been living in."

"Oh, as for that, I don't think we have been anything very particularly gay — have we, Maria? I think our set is dull enough — don't you, child? I declare I think the world's gone stupid since I was young. Yes, I believe the passion for your pianoforte was kept alive. I used to hear you practising it most assiduously at Lord Carlton's, at least; but then it was horribly stupid there, and the poor thing had literally nothing else to do."

"It was not particularly entertaining, certainly," said Maria; "but indeed, Mrs. Gorhambury, I should not have forgotten my darling piano wherever I had been. I love music more passionately than ever."

This was said quite naturally. Maria's taste for music was genuine. She inherited it from her father the Dean. She had been cradled in music. She played charmingly: really charmingly. Not as mere good masters teach a clever girl to play, but with a fine natural talent, carefully developed by the best instruction.

"I thought," said Mrs. Gorhambury, "that Miss Westmore had too much genius ever to prove inconstant to her pianoforte. Great talent and great delight in an occupation are usually found united."

"I do love my pianoforte, dearly," said Maria, "and I have often thought, how charming it would be, if dear Mrs. Gorhambury would let me accompany *her delightful harp*, sometimes. I have brought down *some capital duetts*, of Stoddart's, for harp and pianoforte."

"I know them, I think," cried Mrs. Gorhambury, eagerly. "Is there not one begins la, la, la," singing a stave or two. "Mills sent them down a few weeks back. They are very good. There is an accompaniment for a violoncello obligato, to one or two of them."

Maria coloured a little — a pretty, sweet colour it was, and said "yes, she believed so."

"Then we shall make quite a concert when my son comes back. Philip is gone to Bath, Lady Maria."

"What do you let him go to Bath for? There is nobody worth knowing at Bath."

Mrs. Gorhambury was a little set down by this speech, but she rallied with an:

"Oh, it is only *pour se désennuyer*. We were so dreadfully dull at Castle Avondale. Mr. Gorhambury, I think, grows more sulky every day, and his dislike for company increases. Poor Philip! It really is hard upon a young man, and he hates field sports, you know. I thought he would be moped to death, so I advised him to take a run to Bath. It used to be gay enough at this time of the year in my time."

"I'm sure it's not gay now, at this time or any time. But, true, as you say, one does not know where to go, for Cheltenham is so Irish, and Leamington so commonplace; and, as for the things in Derbyshire, they're horrid. Why don't you send him to Paris?"

"I am a foolish mother. We have been so happy, so much accustomed to enjoy things with each other, that now the continent is at last opened again; I own I wished to travel with him, and that we should visit Paris and Italy for the first time together."

"Well, Mr. Philip Gorhambury is a most exemplary



young man, I do not doubt. I suppose you think you shall keep him *good* by going with him to Paris. Many mothers, I have known, lying under that blessed delusion."

She spoke with the contempt with which a mere passionless woman of conventionalities and the world, regards anything that deviates in the slightest degree from that world's beaten track, quite incapable of either sympathizing with, or even imagining the existence of, feelings strong enough to occasion such a course. She, I believe, thought Mrs. Gorhambury a somewhat out of the way and very affected woman, because she had great talents, strong feelings, and led a life somewhat different from other people.

More especially the affection which was professed between the mother and son appeared to her exaggerated and preposterous; and the idea of such a thing as their really planning to travel together, seemed to her the very climax of absurdity.

Not so to Maria. She thought it charming of Mrs. Gorhambury to be so fond of her son; and thrice charming of Philip to love to travel with his mother. She only wished with all her heart that she might but be of the party.

"Dear mamma," she said, "how natural it seems that Mrs. Gorhambury and Mr. Philip Gorhambury, who have both such a passion for pictures, should love to visit the Louvre together."

"Dear me, yes. I suppose it may be; but it strikes me as rather original. And, so Mr. Philip Gorhambury is really gone to Bath; and who, for goodness' sake — do tell me — who on earth can be *there*?"

"There are the L.'s, I know; and Sir C. C.'s family, and the F.'s" mentioning a few names; and whilst she did so Maria's heart began to beat a little faster. She knew none of these families, but she fancied half a dozen nice girls belonging to each of them.

"The L.'s and the F.'s! Yes, tolerable people. Well, I hope he will amuse himself very much. And, pray, when do you expect him back again?"

"In a fortnight, or ten days, at the farthest. And then, Miss Westmore, we will try the trios, shall we? Philip is excessively improved upon his violoncello; he really plays charmingly."

"How's Mr. Lovel?" interrupted Lady Maria. "The Dean wrote me he had been very ill whilst we were away. I hope he's better. He'd be a great loss; he's such a useful man, I've heard the Dean say."

"And dear Hernana, how is she?" put in Maria. "Mamma, it rained so yesterday, you would not let me go out; but I must put on my bonnet and just run down to her."

"You can't go to-day, child; for one of the carriage-horses is lame. As for your running like a madcap, through those dirty streets towards the wharfs, I do not intend to allow of its ever being done. You forget you are no longer a child."

"Mr. Lovel is better," said Mrs. Gorhambury, "but still unable to resume his duty. They talk of sending him to a milder climate — Cornwall, or, perhaps, the Madeiras. I saw Hernana a quarter of an hour ago. She was full of the scheme."

"What a fine girl that daughter of Mr. Lovel's is!" said Lady Maria. "She reminds me of Lady E. E. Such a gipsy of a creature! I really am half

afraid of her, girl as she is; she has so much dignity about her.

"She is a dear, dear girl," added Maria; "and I love her almost better than any one in the world, except darling Harriet, who is married, and gone nobody knows where. Mamma, you really must let me go to her, or let me send and ask her to come to me. As for the carriage-horse, its leg will never be mended: our carriage-horses' legs never are. So I will have a fly, and a footman; that will be the best way; for I would rather go to her, than send to ask her here now her father's so poorly. And besides, I do so love that Parsonage, and the wee parlour, and the kitchen."

"That I can quite understand," said her mother. "There is nothing I love so much, or think so pretty, as a kitchen in a cottage. Well, child, I have no objection. I think Hernana Lovel a very good friend for you," added Lady Maria, who, when she chose to make use of her understanding, possessed a tolerable one; "better a thousand times than that odious Harriet Manvers, who was the most vulgar school-girl I ever met with — quite enough to make one ill."

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## CHAPTER XXIV.

"You are come back, dear Maria. How dear of you to come to me so soon! so glad, so thrice glad as I am to see you!" cried Hernana, embracing her friend, whose young and lovely face and figure, set off by the elegance of her dress, seemed quite to brighten the lowly little kitchen, into which she had forced herself, delighted to find Hernana there in the midst of her household gods.

"Dear me! I am so glad to come — so glad to be here! Oh! I have seen nothing I liked so well, nothing I thought so pretty, nothing to me so delightful, since I went away, as you, in your kitchen, Hernana."

"What a remarkable thing you are!" giving her a little tap upon the cheek. "What, after all the fine people you have been among, and the fine sights you have seen!"

"I declare to you," said Maria, sitting down, "it is just as I say. I don't know what there is in me, but you cannot think what a bore I find things that everybody seems to like so much, and make such a fuss about. I find what they call society so tiresome; but I believe, as ill-luck would have it, I belong to a very tiresome set of people. I had ten thousand times rather lead the life you lead, Hernana, so that I might but have my pianoforte. I must have my *pianoforte*, you know."

"As great a rage for that as ever?"

"Oh, greater and greater than ever; and I really play so well, it's quite the astonishment of everybody; and of course that adds to the pleasure. It's no vanity in me to say so, but I really do play very well indeed; and I wish you would come to the Deanery, and hear me; but you do not care for pianofortes?"

"Not very much. I love music too, I believe; and I like to hear you, because I love you."

"That's very kind of you to say, Hernana; but what's the matter with you?" said Maria, looking into her friend's face, which, indeed, was paler than usual, and her eyes were heavy, and with a clouded expression, affording a strong contrast to the usual bright serenity of those twin stars. "Mrs. Gorhambury, who was with us yesterday, told me Mr. Lovel had been ill, and that you were very anxious about him, that he did not recover kindly, and that you were going to try change of air. I am sure if *he* wants change of air, you look as if *you* wanted it quite as much; you are quite an altered creature since I went away."

"You have been eighteen months away. Eighteen months is a great space in life! We all change in that time!" said Hernana, willing to put the matter aside. Alas! she knew it was within the last eight-and-forty hours, for that was the time which had elapsed since Mrs. Gorhambury's visit, that the change had come over her.

She did, indeed, look ill. What she had suffered *in that time* exceeds description: though she had from *the first moment* that she heard of Philip's departure *in this unkind manner* — without a line, without a call,

without a word, after all that she could not but be conscious had passed — felt a kind of instinctive certainty that everything was over between them. Dimly the future shadowed itself forth to her mind; how it would *be*, she felt it had not been given her to discern. This feeling alone pressed upon her with that dire conviction not to be shaken off; that melancholy divination of the heart to which, as we will, we seem impelled by a power too strong for us. In vain, as the first panic subsided, and she had leisure to reflect, did she argue the matter with herself, striving to reason herself into a hope, which the something within her obstinately refused to accept. It would not do; her heart seemed to have died within her, all the spirit, relish, light of life to be gone.

Heavy and drooping she went about her usual duties; but all the alacrity with which she was accustomed so cheerfully to fulfil them had forsaken her. In vain she tried to rally — to be what, till that day, she had ever been; in vain!

A blight had gone over her: it seemed as if the death-breathing wind of the desert had passed, and all that was beautiful and glad had withered away.

She had loved Philip so long — so long! that it seemed as if she had loved him before she could remember. Her father and Philip — that had been the whole of her existence. Her father had her affection, her interest, her love, her duty; but Philip was the soul of her life, her light, and her joy!

And how exceedingly happy had been these last four weeks; these four weeks of toil and anxiety, sweetened by his visits, by his kindness, his *tenderness*, and rendered — oh, too rapturous! too exquis-

site! as certain looks, certain words, certain gestures, so precious, so expressive, would escape from him at times; only the more significant, only the more apparently sincere, because they were evidently involuntary.

Such a forty-eight hours as she had gone through since Mrs. Gorhambury's visit! Oh, there are dreadful passages in human life — passages which are endured in the hidden silence of the inner being, unregarded, unrevealed, unmarked by the nearest and dearest, known only to Him who reads the heart, and sends His chastisement of sorrow to His children!

A gleam of joy had gladdened the darkness of her spirit as Maria entered. Kindness is always healing. She had loved the Dean's daughter much; more than, as she had often told herself, was prudent, for she was well aware of the social distance which separated them, and she doubted Maria's constancy. To find her the same — so ready to seek her out — so loving and affectionate, had warmed and cheered her. There was quite a glow of the heart. For a few moments other things were forgotten, and Hernana was herself again. But that soon passed away, and the heaviness of sadness came over her, giving that extraordinary expression of suffering to her face which had surprised Maria so much. Maria was extremely good-natured but not very discerning, and the depression of Hernana's manner must have been great to have excited her attention.

"Change in eighteen months!" was her reply to *Hernana's* remark; "yes to be sure we do, but not as *you are changed*; but I know what it is," she went on, for her poor little foolish heart was full of one

subject almost to the exclusion of every other. "I do believe you are in love! Nay, I vow you are colouring scarlet! This *is* charming! I thought you never would be so — what shall I call it? — as to fall in love. Oh! it is delightful. Now we can have confidences and talk of our lovers together — which, you were so wise, I never dared do before, Hernana. I was forced to take refuge with Harriet Manvers, who was never fit to hold the candle to you; and now she has disgusted me outright, for, after pretending to me to be dying for Lieutenant Oswald, of the 5th, who though he had not a penny, she vowed she was ready to scrub the floor for — what has she done! but, in less than two months' time, thrown the poor man overboard, and married a good-for-nothing old squire, thirty years older than herself, because he has thirty thousand a-year. Isn't it *too* bad?"

Hernana smiled. "I always thought Miss Manvers a little too much a votary of the great world to suit you, Miss Westmore."

"Don't Miss Westmore me; but come and sit down here on the window-seat. How nice it is! with the window open and the robins chirping this morning; and now, first tell me a little about yourself and your affairs, and then I will tell you about mine."

"Dear Maria, how you run on! I have nothing to tell you, believe me; but I shall be happy to hear what you have to tell me."

"Ah, you are so close and reserved. That's a great fault in you, Hernana, let me tell you, for I am as positive as I sit here that you are in love. It is impossible to look in your face and doubt for a moment *what's the matter* with you — I know it," she went



on, "but too well by myself. Oh, Hernana, to think of Philip Gorhambury!"

Hernana gave a sudden start.

"What's the matter?" cried Maria.

No; the idea had never presented itself before. It may seem strange, but she had not seen them much together. The first pang of jealousy, added to that of desertion, is dreadful.

"Nothing! nothing! You were saying something about Mr. Philip Gorhambury, I think."

"You think! Why, to be sure I was. You think! Well, you are a strange creature," said Maria, somewhat pettishly. "Did you never find me out? Harriet Manvers found me out in a moment."

"Perhaps so. I am not clever in finding people out. So, Mr. Philip Gorhambury, perhaps it is, that —"

"Dear me!" cried Maria, throwing herself back in her chair with a sort of childish glee. "So you really never detected me before! How odd you are, Hernana. Oh me! I have been dying for Philip Gorhambury since I can't tell when."

It looked so like impiety, so like sacrilege, so like blasphemy, to speak thus of feelings so sacred; and of him! Hernana dropped the hand she held with a mingled sensation of disgust and contempt; then, forgive her for it, her heart was a little cheered. It was impossible, she felt sure that a man like Philip Gorhambury, having once loved herself, could desert her for a trifler like this. Oh no! He was gone. He had *done that which* she felt he must intend her to *understand as a rupture* of the tie between them. He had *been cruel, not to say treacherous*; but he would not

abandon her for this one! The same instinctive assurance which had driven her well nigh to despair by the certainty that he was parted from her for ever, now told her that he was gone to be free; not to shackle himself to another, not for such another! The pangs of jealousy subsided; and, in comparison, all others seemed supportable. It did her good. The intense pain of the one feeling seemed to annihilate that of the other.

"And to think of his being gone to Bath just as I came home! Is it not cruel? Is it possible he can care for me the least in the world? And yet Harriet Manvers, the last time she was here, vowed that he was dying for me. And she said, the very little notice he ever took of me in company was a certain proof, for that his eyes were never off me when he could do it unobserved. Now tell me what you think of it, Hernana?"

"I have seen you so little together, that I cannot pretend to be a judge; but I should say—" and she hesitated.

"What would you say? Out with it!"

"But you will not like to hear it."

"Not if you are going to say that you think he don't care for me; to be sure, I should not like that. For, in the first place, I'm positive it's false; and in the second, you cannot possibly know. So pray don't torment and tease me with any doubts about that, which I have every reason upon earth to be certain is a fact."

Again Hernana's heart began to sink. Oh! how she longed to question, to lead this somewhat indiscreet young lady to a full avowal of all she thought

and felt; but it seemed to her scarcely honourable to accept the confession of another's feelings when she so resolutely concealed her own. She was silent; which rather provoked the other young lady, who thus ran on:

"I am sure, if implied compliments and pressure of the hand, and standing by the pianoforte whilst I am playing, and all sorts of little things mean anything, there has been no want of them! And I must say, and shall always, that Philip Gorhambury has used me excessively ill if he means nothing; but he must mean something, and I am sure he does mean something, though he *is* gone to Bath. Now do tell me what I ought to think; I assure you the last time I saw him, and that was in London —"

"You met in London!"

"To be sure we did; why do you look so oddly? I declare, Hernana, you are half-crazy this morning. Why, in the name of goodness should we *not* meet in London, if you please?"

"Oh, I don't know! No reason in the world; only I did not know that you had."

"That's not very wonderful, I should think. I suppose Mr. Philip Gorhambury does not render an account of his sayings and goings on to you! Yes, though you don't happen to be aware of it, we *did* meet in London. And Harriet Manvers said, that his attentions were very particular; but, for my part, I wish he had been a little more explicit — sometimes he seemed as if he would, sometimes as if he would *not*. You know, papa was always so glad to see him; and made so much of him, that he was forced to talk a vast deal to him, when Harriet Manvers said she was

positive he was dying to be talking to me; and yet, if papa would go out of the room, he didn't often seem to care to come; he'd chat with mamma, or any one else, or turn over the pages of a book, rather than, as it would seem, come up to me; but Harriet said that was mere shyness and awkwardness, and yet of all men upon earth, Philip seems to me least troubled with those sort of things. What do *you* think?"

"I do not think, to speak honestly, that *I should* be quite of your friend Miss Manvers' opinion. I do *not* think Mr. Philip Gorhambury shy, and I do think if he loved you, he would not keep you in ignorance of it; for why should he?"

"I am sure I can't guess why he should, for I wish papa and mamma didn't show quite so much as they do, how they would like to have him for a son-in-law. Men are such queer creatures, Harriet Manvers says. I should not wonder if he felt himself too secure; I've a good mind to plague him well by flirting with somebody else, and there are plenty would be glad enough. Do tell me what you think, will you, Hernana? There you sit, looking with such an odd face, not saying a word to comfort me — so different from Harriet Manvers."

"I really do not know what to say — because — because I have not seen you much together; but I own by your account, I do not think Mr. Philip Gorhambury is attached to you."

"Oh, you don't — don't you?" in a voice of pique. "Then perhaps you think he is attached to some one else. You, for instance?"

"Oh, not to me!" replied Hernana faintly.

"*I should think* not. You, of all people in the

world! Well, that is the last thing I should suspect Philip Gorhambury of. Take my word for it, love in a cottage, is not Philip Gorhambury's taste. The delightful creature, he deserves a palace, and he knows he does, and I am only afraid he flies too high for poor me — but I protest you look uncommon odd. You are not in love with him yourself, I do hope, Hernana? That *would* be wretched work for you!"

"Oh, don't trouble yourself about me. I am used to take care of myself."

"That's it, however," said Maria, lowering her voice. "That's my secret fear — that he is flying at higher game than me; for you cannot think how excessively he is flattered and admired; and then, besides, he will have such a fine fortune you know, and though Mr. Gorhambury is a horrid, odd sort of a reserved savage, that nobody likes, everybody's excessively charmed with Mrs. Gorhambury; she is the most accomplished creature in the world. So he really might choose where he pleased, and I should not think of hoping about it, if it were not for little looks, and signs, and speeches, that one cannot misunderstand, and which convince me he loves none but me. But, oh! how shall I bring him to declare himself? for Harriet Manvers says, every man on earth wants a landing-net, and I am sure Lady Maria will never take the trouble to handle one for me."

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*This somewhat vapid conversation is given as a specimen of various conversations of the same nature,*

which took place between Hernana and Maria, during the short interval of time which elapsed before Mr. Lovel, his daughter, and Lady Aylmer set out upon their journey.

Though beginning with the most absolute disbelief in the existence of any partiality upon the part of Philip towards Miss Westmore, as these revelations proceeded and became rather more detailed, the wretched Hernana could not conceal from herself that either Maria, misled by her wishes, exaggerated very much, or that Philip was behaving excessively ill to them both; playing a false and treacherous game, the temptations to which, the more she reflected upon them, the less she could understand.

It was easy to believe that his fancy might have been attracted by the pretty face of Maria, and by her unaffected, though rather childish manners; but if so, why did he make any reserve or difficulty about declaring his passion and making proposals for a marriage, which it was plain would be the most agreeable thing in the world to all parties concerned? And oh! if loving and thinking of another, how could he — how dare he — have been, what during her whole life he had more or less been to her — and most of all throughout these last few weeks so dear and precious to her memory?

Could those looks, those tones, those little bursts of involuntary feeling; those broken sentences, half uttered, half called back; those innumerable tokens which the heart alone understands — oh! could all these have been only a mockery? Could Philip Gorchambury be such a vile, heartless, practised deceiver *as that would amount to?* Impossible!

No, he loved her! he must love her! But then, Maria! In that case, how account for his conduct to her; for make what allowances she would for Maria's wish to be deceived, still there was no denying that much which she had related had an appearance of truth. Her wretchedness was extreme.

She knew not what to think — what to do. Her feelings were all in confusion. At times abandoned to that intense longing for a happiness which seemed to have been once within her grasp, but was now withdrawn! Or was it really withdrawn? The doubt, the suspense, was what so hampered her feelings. Doubt! Terrible doubt!

Could she but have come to some conclusion — could she but have been convinced, either of Philip's truth, or of his infidelity, as she thought, she could have borne it. One great struggle, and she felt she should have resolution to disentangle her heart. One bold blow of severance! and, though it would have been bitter as the stroke of death, it would have been over; and from that time forth her cure would begin. Time, which could do nothing for her now, would do everything for her then; as day passed after day, she must, in spite of herself, become better.

Ah! it is uncertainty — cruel, wearing, helpless, uncertainty — which robs so many a cheek of its colour, and fades and withers so many a form:

Those who can end this horrid suspense when they will, are little aware of the tortures they inflict, when, sometimes heedlessly, sometimes through self-distrust, *sometimes with pre-meditation*, they occasion them.





1. The first part of the document is a list of names and titles, including "The Hon. Mr. Justice" and "The Hon. Mr. Justice".

